

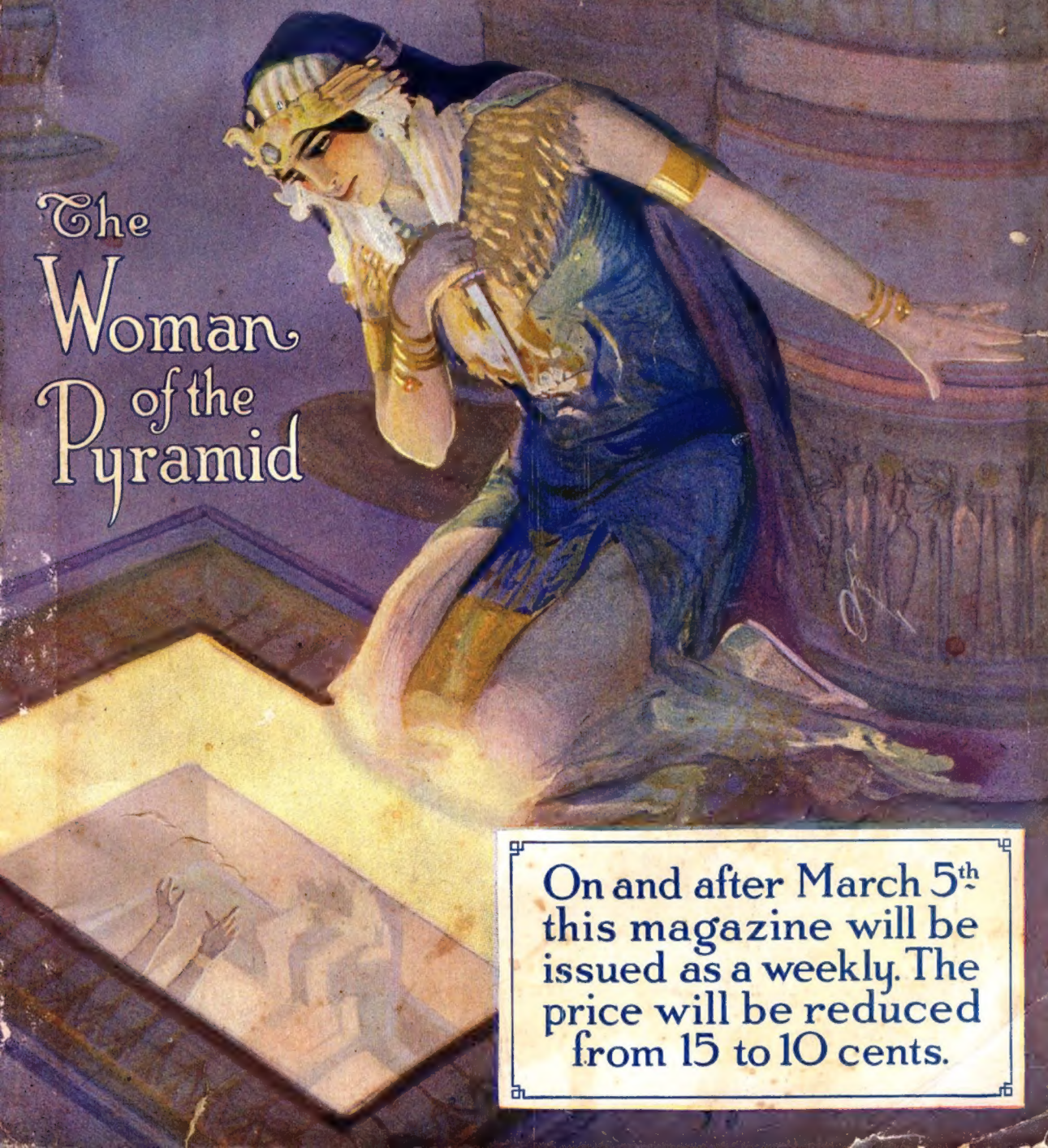
MARCH

THE

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ALL-STORY

The
Woman
of the
Pyramid



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THE ALL-STORY

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The Woman of the Pyramid



by Perley Poore Sheehan

A FULL BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

CARLTON SEES HER AGAIN.

THERE is no question as to whether he saw her or merely thought that he saw her. Such questions, constantly rising in every one's experience, can never be settled, anyway.

There is that well-known brain-expert in Berlin, for example, who even goes so far as to say that half the things that we think we see, in the course of a day's ramble, are nothing but so many illusions. Again, there is that army of professors who claim that everything we see is an illusion.

Let us hasten to remark, however, that this is not a scientific treatise. It is the simple, unvarnished narrative of George Carlton, once of California, sometimes of New York, and occasionally of Cowes, in which latter place his wife's people are well and favorably known in the yachting set.

Let us not anticipate.

George wasn't married then. He and Alice Wentworth were delightfully dawdling away a sunshiny afternoon at a restaurant in the Bois de Boulogne. One of Alice's aunts was also there.

Alice, who herself was as English as a cup of tea—clear complexion, violet eyes, fine-spun "apricot" hair—had all manner of aunts. They are more particular about aunts in merry England than elsewhere—especially when a girl belongs to a wealthy and somewhat aristocratic family, and her father and mother happen to be dead.

The present aunt, albeit she was the best of souls, is of no great consequence. Suffice it to say that she was ultra-respectable, detested suffrage, managed to worry along with not more than a half-dozen servants when at home, and spent most of her time trailing round with Alice wherever the will of this sweet and exceedingly attractive child of fortune happened to lead her.

That also had become the chief occupation of Carlton, ever since he had met her on a friend's yacht at Cannes.

They were sitting there—the three of them—in that happy daze which is apt to fall upon well-situated visitors to the Bois de Boulogne on sunshiny afternoons. The Tzigane orchestra was zimming and swirling through one of those unwritten rhapsodies for which Tziganes are famous — weird sort of music with all sorts of haunting tremors and quavers and minor chords in it.

Probably no one had spoken for the last fifteen minutes. They were perfectly content with each other. Even the aunt was content with Carlton—now that her solicitor had furnished her with a private report as to the unexceptional standing of Carlton “in the States.” Away back in Revolutionary days there had been a younger son of a great house, and he was the ancestor of the American Carltons.

Every now and then Carlton was touching the tip of Alice's little finger with the tip of his little finger—quite accidentally, of course—when suddenly he gave a start, leaned forward, was rigid for a second or two with absorbed attention. Alice saw the erstwhile careless hand grip the table, then relax. She swept her violet eyes upon him.

It was just about settled by this time that they were to be married, and she had begun to show those first delicate, timid burgeons of wifely care.

“What is it?” she asked.

Her own listlessness had disappeared. Perhaps there had flashed through her mind the thought that she did not know this man she was willing to marry quite so well as she thought she did. Anyway, she had seen something in his face that would have made any woman a bit uneasy.

Aunt Mary, her eye on a group at another table, among whom were some people whom she thought she recognized, had let the incident pass unnoticed.

Carlton relaxed, let out an uneasy

little laugh, again touched the smooth, pink tip of Alice's little finger.

“What was it, George?” she repeated. “Really, you looked as though you had seen a ghost.”

Said Carlton: “Maybe I did.”

“See a ghost? How absurd!”

There was a shade of reproach in Alice's violet eyes, but there was a kindling of interest there as well. Carlton was always so dreadfully dramatic.

According to most of Alice's friends all Americans were picturesque. Carlton was not picturesque. So far as manners and looks were concerned, he was certainly far above the average. But he was always doing surprising things, saying surprising things like that.

“Maybe I did,” he repeated softly as his level, gray eyes met hers, with only the barest suspicion of humor in them.

Neither did Alice smile. She looked back at him seriously, trying to comprehend. That was a quality of hers—one of many—which had convinced Carlton that very first afternoon that they had ever met that she was the one girl in the world with whom he could ever possibly get along.

“Tell me,” he went on softly and still quite seriously, “did you notice that woman who just passed—there, between those two clumps of oleanders, or whatever they are?”

“You frighten me,” said Alice, her voice but little more than a whisper. “Bur-r-r! Your tone, your question, and this weird music. What did she look like?”

“Green eyes and straight brows—black!”

“Bur-r-r!” went Alice again.

“Uncanny, all right,” said Carlton. “Something imperious about her—something Egyptian—cattish, cruel, beautiful, but—oh, you know—the lady-villain at Drury Lane, only more so.”

Up to this time Miss Wentworth's interest, though genuine enough, might have been classed as academic. But it

had obviously become suddenly more than that. The delicate pink of her complexion—the kind you hardly ever see except in England and the American Northwest—had quickly receded, then rushed back again a little more pronounced than before. She had swept a rapid, tremulous glance around her.

"No, I didn't see her," she said. "Tell me about her."

Carlton lit a cigarette, repeated that uneasy little laugh of his, glanced at the blissfully complacent aunt—unconscious she of any mystery greater than the family receipt for Christmas puddings—then back at Alice.

"I told you that I had seen my ghost," he remarked.

"My ghost, too!"

Alice might have said this. Those were the words which had flashed into her mind, but she kept her silence. After all, it could have been a mere coincidence. She had regained her equanimity.

"How was she dressed?" she asked.

"You can't tell how a ghost is dressed unless you have time to look. I only had a glance—clearer, this time, than before; still, only a glance."

"You insist?"

"On nothing, my Rose of Sharon, if it's going to upset you. Only, if I am to be a victim of delusions, I'm honor bound to tell you."

"Tell me, anyway."

"Three times now," said Carlton, disguising his obvious seriousness by a light motion of his hand into the air, in case the aunt might be looking—"three times now, and each of the times when I was in your blessed company—which isn't surprising, seeing how close I stick round—I've either seen, or thought I saw, this same creature."

While he spoke the orchestra swooned and palpitated in a delirium of enchantment.

"Perhaps this confounded music has gone to my head," said Carlton. "There was music on the other two

occasions, as well—this same sort of music, crazy and wild. I suppose that Beethoven could stir up one sort of ghost—blue, angelic; and Sousa another. But this sort of music is hers—savage, Egyptian."

"The Pembertons are also going to Egypt," said Aunt Mary, catching the last word and wishing to be polite.

By the time that the young people had smiled at her and nodded, she had relapsed once more into the comfortable lethargy of a well-fed dowager.

"Do you remember when we dined at the Savoy? I saw her then—just that glance—same impression of green eyes and black brows—queer, striking, slightly ghoulish. Big dining-room, lots of people moving about, especially women, I not noticing any of them but you, naturally, until the ghost appears."

"I shouldn't have noticed her, then, if it hadn't been for the odd way she looked at me, my feeling that I had seen her before. Looked again and she was gone."

"Could it be—" Alice began.

"You are going to ask me for a scientific explanation," said Carlton. "But the very fact of my having studied psychology, psychiatry and things makes me all the more chary of trying to explain. As a fledgling scientist I, for one, am ready to admit that science doesn't know a blessed thing about the insides of our heads at all."

"And the other time?"

"The same thing, only a trifle more so. Do you remember that evening in Munich when we were walking back from the opera—moonlight, wonderful air, crowds, fragments of *Aida* still mingling all round? Well, just before we came to the hotel I saw her again—that same level, inscrutable look from her green eyes, very close to us, general impression of wealth and good taste, yet bizarre. As soon as I could I turned to look after her. She had disappeared."

"Could it be—" Alice began again, and this time Carlton didn't interrupt her. "Could it be telepathy?"

"It could be telepathy," the American assented good-naturedly. "if you knew such a creature and happened to be thinking about her. But, of course, you—"

He paused, the slight suggestion of banter in his face and voice going out as she saw how the pink in Alice Wentworth's face again fled under his scrutiny.

"Listen," she whispered tremulously, while she forced a smile. "I also have something to tell. Oh, could it, could it be that you speak of my Aunt Rhodopis?"

CHAPTER II.

AUNT RHODOPIS.

WHEN Carlton had referred to himself as a "fledgling scientist," he had done scant justice to himself.

As a matter of fact, if he had been forced to earn his living he could have been doing so since a long time either in private practise or in connection with any of the large hospitals which make a specialty of nervous and mental diseases. He had always had a passion for such things, and if his money had prevented him from pursuing his profession with any degree of regularity, it had at least permitted his development along another line.

This particular line was that field of research which most scientists regard as beyond the frontier of legitimate research; who stick to the old régime, anyway, whatever their private beliefs might be, for fear of seeing themselves driven away from the scientific flesh-pots on the charge of being cranks or dreamers.

It takes money, as well as courage, to be a follower of such scientific freebooters as Hudson and Sir Oliver Lodge.

Carlton had both money and courage. He also had—or, at least, his friends were all ready to concede that he had—a fair amount of intellect as well.

And Carlton could see no good reason why he should not investigate the uncharted hills and valleys of the far West of science as boldly as his grandfather had investigated the hills and valleys of California. His grandfather had found a gold mine or two. Why shouldn't he?

He had started out with spiritualism, had worked his way—figuratively speaking—up to East Indian magic and back again. Until Alice Wentworth became the all-absorbing theme of his observations, he had been a pretty frequent visitor at the big hospitals of London, Paris, Berlin, and Vienna.

In the course of his life, up to the present, there was just one word which he loved and feared, a word that at once ensnared his passionate interest and yet filled him with contemptuous despair. This word was "occult."

He had a consuming thirst for everything that this much-abused word predicated. He had a horror, none the less, of the charlatans who delight in its use.

It was through this personality—here so slightly and poorly limned—that Carlton again flashed his interest upon the extremely fair, subtle, and responsive creature at his side.

"Your Aunt Rhodopis?" he exclaimed. "Have I met her?"

Alice shook her head. There had come a disquieting moisture into her eyes, but she smiled.

"Not unless"—she faltered—"not unless this is she."

"Tell me what she looks like."

"She looks like what you say this ghost of yours looks like. At least, that is the way I remember her."

"How long is it since you have seen her?"

"Not for years—not since I was twelve."

"Eight years," Carlton calculated.

"You and she are not on good terms."

"None of us are on good terms with Aunt Rhodopis. She is queer, terrible."

"Not mad?"

"No, not mad. In fact, she is a very remarkable woman, I believe, in many respects. Lives in a great old house—a regular museum filled with Egyptian treasures. She travels a good deal—out East—is something of an Oriental herself."

"She looks like—"

"The devil," Alice flared. "Beautiful, in a way—green eyes, straight brows, but somehow bizarre—just as you described that ghost of yours."

"Not a blood relation of yours?" Carlton suggested.

"Yes, of my mother's. Very distant. I fancy, though it was my Aunt Rhodopis who cared for me after my mother's death."

"So you came to know her well."

Alice shook her head.

"My only memory of her is as a mystery—a dark mystery."

"But kind?"

Again Alice shook her head, while the delicate pink stain crept from cheek to temple, then back again. Her next words came in a mere breathing whisper.

"She struck me."

"Good Lord!"

There was that about the way that Alice had delivered her last bit of information which meant that the blow had been no mere spanking of a wayward child.

Whatever might have been the dark secret and the dark character of Aunt Rhodopis, the present aunt conveyed no sense of aristocratic middle age, as she beamed upon the two young people at the table with her. She had just come out of a pleasant reverie of meeting Colonel Pemberton and his estimable family during the season at Cairo.

She glanced first at her niece, then at the young man. Mr. Carlton was really quite presentable—quite presentable even though he were an American. But, then, he had some excellent English blood in his veins—and blood will tell, whatever new-fangled ideas

were coming into favor concerning the abolishment of the House of Lords.

"So you think you also will be going to Egypt, Mr. Carlton?" she interrogated, as she had already done a dozen times before. Really, it was high time that Alice was getting settled, and, apart from his nationality, Carlton was rather unobjectionable.

"Oh, yes, indeed, if you'll permit me," Carlton answered heartily. "I haven't been out to Egypt for two years now, and this will give me an added motive. You may not believe me, but I had intended going out, anyway. Matter of some half-baked scientific researches of mine."

Auntie nodded her head approvingly.

"Americans—so Sir Edward Plumton tells me—have been doing some really remarkable excavation in Egypt recently."

"It was another sort of excavation that I intended," said Carlton good-naturedly. "Myths, traditions, magic—things like that. Not very respectable, I fear, but interesting. And then, the last time I was in Cairo I saw any number of mad or half mad beggars—"

"How dreadful!"

"Dreadful, yet interesting—like germs. And there was something that has since turned up that has somehow—"

He had checked himself and fallen into momentary absorption. It is a way that many young men have who are wont to think of the more serious things of the world—even when they have an Alice Wentworth at their side.

They rode back to Paris in comparative silence. Already the season was very late and the fashionable exodus for the south had begun, but there was still plenty to attract their attention, furnish an excuse for no great effort at conversation.

But all the way both Alice Wentworth and George Carlton were conscious, in a way, that both were think-

ing of the same thing—of the same person, perhaps. They were thinking of that odd ghost of his, of that odd aunt of hers. Were they the same? Had it been, as Alice had suggested, a queer case of telepathy, by which her mind had suggested to his, without the intermediary words, a fleeting, disquieting portrait of this other aunt?

Aunt Rhodopis!

The very name again brought up in Carlton's thought some half-forgotten things he had heard on that last trip of his to Egypt. It was concerning these that he had come within an ace of blurting out something a little while ago.

The train of recollection thus started was still uppermost in his mind, a little while later, as, at the door of the hotel, he bade Alice and her aunt good day. He had detained the girl's fingers in his own for a second longer than necessary. Their eyes had met with what must have seemed to both of them as a new understanding.

Then Carlton, unexpectedly even to himself, put the question so softly that none but she could hear. None would have understood the significance of it, even if they had heard.

"Tell me," he asked earnestly, "did you ever hear of the Woman of the Pyramid?"

CHAPTER III.

THE STORY OF HAMID YUSEF.

ONE of the oddest characteristics of the human brain—so that rising young psychologist, George Carlton, had noticed more than once in the course of his life—is its facility as a long-distance jumper.

A friend is about to tell you the *dénouement* of an alluring bit of scandal, or something like that. You are on the tiptoe of interest. You can't wait for the next word. Then some trivial interruption occurs, and the whole thing is left in abeyance for months, possibly for years.

Sometimes, in fact, the mind takes such a terrific jump from a spring-board like this that it never comes back at all. Was this to be another case in point?

They had traveled together to the Riviera—Carlton, Miss Wentworth, and her aunt—had embarked at Marseilles on the same ship, had traveled together to Alexandria, and thence to Cairo. And still that question had remained unanswered.

"Tell me, did you ever hear of the Woman of the Pyramid?"

As Carlton sat alone in front of his window at Shephard's he recalled the question. His asking of it seemed somehow very remote. He recognized it now—he and Alice had not reverted to the subject by some sort of tacit consent.

Why had they never taken up again that curious conversation which had begun in the Bois de Boulogne? Why had she never referred again to her Aunt Rhodopis? Why had he never referred again to that ghost of his? Why had he not repeated his question concerning the Woman of the Pyramid?

Once more there drummed through his brain a jingle that he had heard some place years ago and stored away all unconsciously. Like a soft-footed mental ghost it had been padding up and down the bypaths of his brain almost ever since Alice and her aunt had started up the Nile, leaving him here in Cairo alone.

He wished now that he had gone with them. He was feeling cursedly lonely. He had never felt lonely before in his life—not, at any rate, when he was in a foreign country with a perpetually interesting city around him.

He tried to whistle, tried to reflect, tried to take a mental survey of his circumstances—to tell himself that he was young, healthy, with plenty of money, not too much, but sufficient; and that he was certainly the elect of the finest girl in the two hemispheres.

All this, but through it all there drummed that Satanic refrain:

Fair Rhodopé, as story tells,
The bright, unearthly nymph who dwells
Mid sunless gold and jewels hid—
The Lady of the Pyramid!

There came a knock at the door, and Carlton was brought back to immediate circumstances with a jolt. He had come up to his room after dinner to get something or other, he hardly remembered what; had been sitting there idly dreaming ever since. He felt as though he had been awakened from a sound sleep.

Faint, yet distinct, there came to him the noises of the night—music and laughter from below-stairs, the shrill, odd pulse of the city.

"Come in—and what is it?"

"It is Osman, sir."

"Hello, Osman," said Carlton. "I sha'n't need you to-night. Go out and enjoy yourself."

"Please, sir," said the servant. "I have found the man you speak about."

Carlton turned with a start of pleased surprise. Osman, dressed in the white *galabeah* and red *tarboosh* of the Cairo *suffragi*, or personal servant, smiled at him through the semi-darkness.

"Where is he?"

"We find him on the steps of the mosque of Ibn-Tulun," Osman said. "He thinks he's haunted by an Afrit—by an evil spirit. He refuses to leave the mosque."

"But there is only one Afrit that interests me, Osman, and that's the evil spirit of the Red Pyramid."

"Of such he speaks, *monsieur*."

"What's his name?"

"His name is Hamid Yusef."

"Only one eye?"

"Only one eye, so far as I could see through his hair and his rags."

It was about an hour later that Carlton, dressed inconspicuously, a red *tarboosh* like that which Osman wore replacing his ordinary hat, passed through the streets of Old Cairo to-

ward the deserted, ancient mosque of which his servant had spoken. High, gray houses—as ancient as Egypt itself they seemed—looked down upon him sullenly. He felt a little tremor of excitement.

Was it really superstition that had kept Alice Wentworth and himself from reverting to the subject of their conversation in the Bois de Boulogne, he wondered; or was there some deeper reason? Egypt is full of mystery, and always will be.

He and Osman walked in silence until they came to the steps of the mosque of Ibn-Tulun.

At first Carlton had a disappointing impression that no one was there, it was all so dark and deserted; then he heard a crooning voice—the wail of the ancient Mohammedan who asks charity.

"There he is now," whispered Osman.

Rags and gray hair, then a single gleaming point of light in the midst of it which Carlton recognized as an eye—a formless gray shadow in the gray shadows of unlighted stone steps and a blank wall. The shadow again stirred and once more there crooned from it that wailing voice, softer now than before.

"In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, have mercy on Hamid Yusef, who has seen the Woman of the Pyramid!"

Osman was translating glibly, with only a slight accent, with only an occasional French word—a souvenir of some former master of his.

"Tell him," said Carlton, "that there are others among the faithful whom the Prophet has favored with madness; that they also claim to have seen the Woman of the Pyramid."

"There have been many such."

Carlton, standing very erect, looked down at the ancient beggar. There was something so hoary and patriarchal in the rags and beard, that single eye gleaming up at him through the twilight, that it seemed impossible that

this could be the source of a lie—of self-deception, perhaps, of superstition; but not of a lie.

"Tell him I want to hear the story—that I'll give him a piece of gold."

Osman, while a perfectly good gossip, was no great hand at telling a story; yet, even he was unable to lose all of the touches which Hamid Yusef gave to his account.

"Behold, this shriveled form was once young, beautiful, filled with the juices of youth. I was the man Mark Twain spoke about—skipping up and down the pyramids like a goat. The eminent and the beautiful traveled all the way round the world, not to see the pyramids, nor even the mosques, but merely to see Hamid Yusef skip up and down the pyramid.

"Having thus won all the glory in the world, behold there remained yet another feat which beckoned me. We dwellers in the shadows of the pyramids know that not only is the sphinx haunted, but the pyramids themselves, and all the ground whereon they stand.

"There are as many spirits round about there as there are grains of sand in the desert. These have a queen. She is the Woman of the Pyramid.

"Her home is in the Red Pyramid—the third—the one she built, and it was there that I went to see her. Each night of the new moon she appears.

"It was the night of the new moon that I waited. I wore a new *burnoose*. I was washed and perfumed. I had new shoes. There wasn't a lady in Cairo who wouldn't have called me master.

"Then she stood in front of me, quivering—more beautiful than the daughter of the mosque-keeper who opens that little wicket up there every morning and throws me a piece of bread.

"She beckoned. I followed. She was lighter on her feet than the silver of the moon. Hamid Yusef, the admiration of Mark Twain, pursued. Ah, I was scented with all the per-

fumes of the *hamin*, but she smelt sweeter still, and she was laughing back at me. It was better than a hashish dream. I had my hand out, just touched her veil—"

"Go on—tell him to go on," said Carlton.

"He says he wants money," said Osman. "Says he has a wife and five young children."

Carlton had put his hand into his pocket. He was willing to make a generous contribution. This was certainly what he had come after. This impressed him all the more as he glanced about him, noted again the unlighted steps, the dim, gray walls that must have stood just there for centuries; the abiding presence of the vast, old, deserted mosque of Ibn-Tulun—the oldest in Cairo—the oldest in Africa, perhaps.

His fingers took note of the loose coins in his pocket, searching, weighing, seeking a piece of gold. Then he went rigid, let out a little gasp.

The slender form of a woman had suddenly appeared, there just a few steps above them, was coming in their direction—"as lightly as the silver of the moon."

Now, even while he looked, Carlton weighed all the pros and cons of possible delusion. His mental fingers, like the fingers in his pocket, were searching for the piece of gold—the gold of truth, in this instance. For, even before he could recognize her, he knew who this woman—whether real or spectral—would be.

She passed quite close to him—so close that his heart fluttered at once with embarrassment as well as excitement.

She had looked at him squarely and he had looked at her. In an ordinary woman that look of hers would have been brazen—it was so bold, so full of promise, so confident and frank. Yet, there was that in it which gave him a nameless thrill of fear as well. It was as full of slumberous peril as the stare of a snake.

The eyes were green. They looked at him from under straight, black brows.

He tore away his own attention long enough to glance at Osman and the antique beggar, Hamid Yusef.

Osman hadn't moved, still stood there looking down at the old man. The old man himself had shrunk a little deeper into his rags and beard.

Carlton whirled back to where his eyes had left the woman, looked up, looked down, looked all around.

She had disappeared.

CHAPTER IV.

NIGHT OF THE NEW MOON.

DANCES, dinners, almost daily letters from Alice up the Nile—which he answered with some fervor, as well as with perfect promptness—and all the other ordinary features of the Egyptian season; yet Carlton could not get away from the feeling of mystery that clung close about him. For that matter, he didn't try to. It was in keeping with his mood.

Only in a roundabout way had he questioned Osman about the apparition he had seen on the steps of the mosque of Ibn-Tulun. It must have been an apparition. Like every other member of his race and class, Osman was not the person to let any woman pass unnoticed.

He had flouted the mere possibility of such a thing almost tearfully. No, there had been no woman on the steps of the mosque while they were there—nor anywhere near, unless, perhaps, behind those inscrutable gray walls.

The walls of Old Cairo—of *Uicur Caire*—always look as though they might conceal languishing slaves with painted lips and eyes.

Carlton took note of himself—investigated himself as though he were at once specialist and patient; as, indeed, to some extent, he was. For, on that previous visit of his to Egypt—it had not been made "during the sea-

son"—he had traveled far into the desert with some friends of his on a mission from Harvard, and had managed to be touched by the sun.

Carlton's own valuable monograph on sunstroke can be consulted in most of the scientific libraries of the world to-day.

But what interested him now was the fact that many of the subsequent effects of the sunstroke seemed to be returning to him now—the same occasional lapses of memory, the same prevalence of reverie or day-dream, the same brooding sense of mystery, the same premonitions of forthcoming events. Whether these events concerned the actual, visible world, or merely the world of his imagination, was of no great concern. That an adventure was impending he felt certain—increasingly certain.

He had always nourished the belief that atmosphere and locality had much to do with the phenomena of the world; had always believed that things which were possible in one country, for example, were impossible elsewhere.

With him from America he had brought a bunch of keys—each key, doubtless, of perfectly good steel. Now they were rusty, every one of them. Yet native steel, as there was abundant evidence all about him, did not rust at all.

Wasn't the same thing possible, in a different degree, with the infinitely more delicate and responsive substance of the human mind? He had known Indian jugglers who had been utterly incapable of performing their commonest tricks—or miracles—outside of their own country.

Wasn't it just possible that their minds had rusted in the new environment, just as these American keys of his had rusted in the air of Egypt?

More than that. Wasn't it possible that his own mind was reacting to the million mysterious currents of this ancient land, where other minds, no stronger than his, only different, responded not at all?

One of the resident physicians at Shephard's, Dr. Blake—an old friend of his—met him in the hall one day.

"A trifle liverish," Dr. Blake diagnosed. "Come into my office and have a pill."

Carlton laughed.

"I'm treating my own case."

The incident ended there, so far as Dr. Blake was concerned. Some idle, friendly talk and they had gone their several ways. But the physician's remark lingered in Carlton's thought. He was feeling queer, and no mistake. What his friend had said accentuated the fact. What was this thing that was hanging over him?

Since his interview with Hamid Yusef, he had prodded deeper into that myth of the Woman of the Pyramid. He had talked long with another half-crazed beggar he had found near the old Coptic church—had heard practically the same story. He had found others, and still others. Cairo seemed to be filled with crazy men who attributed their downfall—or their good fortune, seeing that all such are under the special protection of the Prophet—to that same haunting spirit of the Pyramid of Menkaura.

He had discovered the same tradition in the only translation he could find of the Arab historian, al-Murtadi.

It was all right for the other strangers within the gates of this ancient land—tourists, Turkish, English, and French officialdom, greedy Levantines of every stripe—it was all right for such to laugh at the old tradition. But he had facts of his own. Real facts they were, too, however odd, however unscientific.

In the first place there was not only the appearance of Alice's Aunt Rhodopis. There was the name Rhodopis itself—a name constantly recurring in everything that he could find concerning the Red Pyramid—the third and smallest of the eternal Three, and yet the most fascinating.

They called it the Pyramid of Menkaura, but a woman had built it—had

built it away back in the dawn of time—Queen Netokris or the fabulous courtesan Rhodopis—who could tell?

And Carlton had seen her again—had once more looked upon that private, haunting, beautiful, yet terrible specter of his. This time, as on that day in the Bois de Boulogne, looked upon her in the full flood of daylight with plenty of other people there also to see, had they cared or been able.

It was the hour of afternoon tea—the great rooms of Shephard's crowded by the rich and the fashionable and the otherwise celebrated from the six continents. A blaze of color—anything lacking in that respect being supplied by the servants in red and white.

Carlton, seated by himself, only dimly conscious of the music and the frothy surge of laughter and conversation, of tinkling silver, glass, and porcelain.

Then, there she stood again.

This time he looked his fill.

She stood at the far end of the room, slender, graceful, exquisitely dressed—though this latter fact was a mere impression, Carlton, like many men, being quite incapable of ever noting the detail of feminine costume. She looked back at him quite as steadily.

She had an olive complexion: red lips, painted, perhaps, but not too much; blue-black hair; and then, those singular disquieting eyes, dark-fringed, yet light, under fine, straight black brows that did not curve at all except where they drooped a little at the temples.

He looked and looked. So did she. There was no feeling of embarrassment on his part this time. There was romance in it, unquestionably; but, so far as he was concerned, there was something more than romance. There was the passion for truth which fires every scientist, especially if he be something of an idealist, if he have a touch of the poet in him.

The bright unearthly nymph who dwells

'Mid sunless gold and jewels hid.

Was it possible that he was to be permitted to solve the old, old riddle that

al-Murtadi had spoken about? Was this the Woman of the Pyramid?

He smiled at her, and she smiled back. Steadily, as steadily as though he had a full glass of water in his hand which he didn't want to spill, Carlton got up from his chair and started forward, his eyes still on the enchantress, real or imaginary—whatever she was.

While this had been in progress an extremely fat and bald-headed gentleman, accompanied by two extraordinarily slim and hirsute young women, had been making his way down the center of the crowded room. With a polite nod he moved toward the table which Carlton had just vacated, blocking Carlton's view for a moment.

When Carlton could look again the woman was gone.

That same evening, obedient to some instinct which led him as surely as the homing instinct directs a pigeon to its destination, Carlton found himself on the long road that leads from the suburbs of Cairo to the pyramids.

They reared their mountainous, silhouettes—the imperishable Three, as mighty and mysterious as Egypt is in the history of mankind—shimmering gold and purple against the western sky.

The pyramids!

The sun went down. Night crept in upon him like an ancient spell. Still the pyramids hung nebulous in front of him—as real and as unreal as a figment of his imagination. What was reality and unreality, anyway?

Were these mysterious mountains of hewn stone any more real or any less real than the other legacies handed down to man from the remote past—the legacy of memories and experiences which every man, however poor, carries round in the back of his head?

The lebbek-trees were black—blackier than they had ever appeared before. The entire landscape had taken on a magical aspect, holy, solemn, brooding.

There was no sound. Carlton had a peculiar sensation of being all alone in

the world—of having passed into a sort of cosmic anteroom—the ordinary world behind him, the palace of the unknown just ahead, yet unexplored.

Then it was as though a servant had appeared from the palace and bade him enter. Every nerve in his body was crisping.

He stood there looking into the young night-sky, hypnotized by the dim and slender crescent that he saw there.

It was the night of the new moon.

CHAPTER V.

INTO THE DARK.

It may be said with perfect confidence that everything depends on a man's personality, on his temperament, anyway. The Society for Psychical Research, both in England and in America, has paid a good deal of attention to this phase of a man. The majority of people never see a ghost, never have even a ghostly feeling, except a sort of "creepiness," perhaps, when something or other occurs that they do not immediately understand.

Yet, over against this truth is the other—that the annals of the world, both written and unwritten, in every language, from every country and every century, are filled with ghost stories.

Not only that, but the learned society mentioned above has investigated no end of such stories in a purely scientific spirit and has found them to be true.

It results that what are vulgarly called ghosts are real, and that, while the vast majority of the earth's population can't see them, there are others who can; and that there always have been such.

This, to some extent, is merely a reflection of what was passing through George Carlton's mind as he stood there on the edge of the desert, the pyramids soaring into the mystic, shadowy air to one side of him, that other vast shadow of the sphinx—he could understand why the Arabs called

it "the Father of Terrors"—beyond; that timorous, slender new moon, "like a frightened girl," floating in the sky above him.

It had always been the same—for Hamid Yusef on the steps of the mosque, for the old beggar outside the Coptic church, and every other loose madman that Osman had ferreted out for him; it had always been the same—on the night of the new moon they had seen her and followed the Woman of the Pyramid.

Carlton laughed.

"Shall I risk madness, too?"

His only answer was to walk forward, to surrender himself completely to the spell of the hour and the place.

He was not much of an Egyptologist, but he was fairly familiar with the ordinary aspects of the pyramids, of the sphinx, and their surrounding geography.

Over there, in ancient times, lay Memphis, and this had been the City of the Dead. It still was, after the lapse of all these centuries. No wonder that the Arabs preferred to give the place a wide berth at night!

What spells of magic, black and white, had not been woven into the winding-sheets of the thousands of dead who had been buried here? He, for one, would never deny that the priests of this ancestor of nations were masters of magic of every kind.

The sphinx! Even in that dim light he could see on its scarred visage the awe of the man who looks upon eternity. Who else but a master-magician, a demigod, could have dreamed such a dream as this monument and then have had it executed! It was old, most likely, when even the pyramids were young; and they—

Cheops, Chefren, Menkaura!

To think that there were men who, in the name of science, would have these considered as mere burial places!

For Carlton, as for so many others, they epitomized the human race—its knowledge, so much of which had been lost; its aspirations, the same now as

they had always been; its dim, unknowable origin, its unknowable end.

He remembered the first time that he had ever entered one of these man-made mountains—the warm darkness as he followed the twinkling candle of his guide deeper and deeper under the million tons of stone.

He had felt then, as he felt now, like the initiate of the ancient Mysteries. For, until any man has followed some twinkling light to the very heart of material appearance, what can he possibly know of life or of death or of the Giver of these things?

But it was the Pyramid of Menkaura—the Red Pyramid, the least but most beautiful of the three great ones—that drew Carlton now. And he was ready to admit to himself that there was something more than mere moralizing in his heart as he drew near to it. He felt almost as though he knew it—as though it were expecting him.

The Pyramid of Queen Netokris, of the "Ruddy-Faced" Rhodopis! The Pyramid of the Woman!

There is an entrance to this pyramid—well known to tourists—on the northern side. From this, a long, narrow tunnel slants down to the chamber, far below the pyramid-floor and almost under the apex.

This entrance became Carlton's destination at first. He admitted it, half amusedly, half ashamed. He, George Carlton, man of science, almost thirty, prowling alone at night in the neighborhood of the pyramids in the quest of a ghost!

But no man's mood, unless he was a good deal of a downright idiot, could be anything but solemn for any length of time in this august company. By the time that Carlton had come to the rough foot of the Third Pyramid, had paused once to glance up its sloping height—reaching, like Jacob's ladder, to the very stars—he was again submerged in queer, half-formed broodings.

The night fell deeper. It was almost, as though he were a diver in a blue;

ethercal sea—going deeper and deeper, ever deeper into hitherto fathomless depths.

Had the hands of the dial of eternity been turned back it would be like this. The pyramids knew no age. Neither did Harmachis, the great sphinx, who still guarded the cemetery of Memphis.

There is a quality of the desert night which writers and travelers have often mentioned. It is the quality which nature often possesses — of making a man feel himself be but the smallest grain of dust, the merest microbe. Add to this the huge, mystical mass of the pyramids, and you will have the feeling that engulfed Carlton as he waited there — waited, he wouldn't have said for what.

Blue night, blue shadows, each great star a golden lamp, that frightened girl of a new moon gone long ago! He, the only atom of human consciousness in time or space, seated on a stone of Menkaura's pyramid—that one stone as old as the earth and as solid!

He had been seated there for he couldn't say how long. He had passed on by when he came to the entrance on the north side of the pyramid; had passed on round to the west where he knew that, for half the distance round the world, there was, perhaps, no other human being—empty desert and empty sea and empty sky. Then he was conscious that another presence was drawing near.

He did not stir, did not move his eyes even from their contemplation of the sky. But there had come a slight creeping of his superficial nerves, a sensation of nameless expectancy.

While he sat there, as he always said afterward, he experienced a swift review of everything which had led up to this supreme moment—the first time that he had ever seen that particular ghost of his back in the Savoy while the orchestra was playing; again, in Munich, with the strains of *Aida* in the air; again, in the Bois de Boulogne, on the steps of the mosque, in the crowded

room at Shepherd's; the prescience that this was the Woman of the Pyramid; and, more than all else, that she was here now, just behind him, looking at him, waiting for him to turn!

He turned.

He saw her standing there, only a few paces away. Perhaps it was that wonderful blue light of the desert night which cast a spell over his senses. At any rate, she appeared more beautiful and alluring than whenever he had seen her before.

There was a gust of tepid air, and it brought to him such perfume as he had never even dreamed of before; then a tingling of witch-music—as though the spirits of all the musicians he had ever heard and loved had cast their very best into a few bars and a few chords.

She smiled at him. He found himself scrambling to his feet—and a feeling scrambling to its feet in his heart such as he had hardly known existed there, even on that first night when he had first kissed Alice.

His nerves were still crisping. It was a good deal like that time that he had smoked a hashish cigarette.

A little while before (wrote Carlton, in the second and last monograph he has ever published), I was fully aware that man, in the presence of infinity, is himself infinity—the infinitely small in the presence of the infinitely great.

Matter, of course, is never at rest. The molecules of the brick swing free in their eternal dance. Was I not but a sentient molecule swinging free in the material universe as I followed the Woman into the Pyramid?

Carlton felt a pair of vibrant arms under his head, felt a perfumed, tepid breath on his face, looked up into the glowing eyes of the woman who had been haunting him.

CHAPTER VI.

THROUGH GHOSTLY CORRIDORS.

HE knew that they had not entered the Pyramid of Menkaura by the pass-

ageway used by tourists to-day. In that monograph of his there is a rough sketch which indicates, so far as possible, the route which he and "the woman" had followed—a succession of ghostly corridors, concerning which there is to-day no other record. Nothing will ever be done about it, most likely. The indications—Carlton admits it frankly enough—leave much to be desired.

Neither geometry nor geography were uppermost in his mind at the time, as you may readily imagine.

It was, indeed, to some extent as though he were but another molecule passing through intermolecular space. Yet there was nothing unnatural about it.

It wasn't the first time that he had been into the pyramid. There was the same impression of warm darkness, of silent, stirless air. He is quite sure that "the Woman" carried no light. Such light as there was seemed to be diffused, just sufficient to discover the massive stone walls and roofs and floor.

Corridor after corridor, narrow and long! Once or twice they had paused in front of a monolith which blocked the passage, had seen it silently displaced to let them pass.

Then a rock-chamber not much more than ten feet square—a cruciform couch in the center of it covered with lion-skins, the walls richly frescoed with figures which even he knew were explanatory of Ethiopian magic.

"I know that others have gone mad through having looked at you," said Carlton. "Is that what has happened to me?"

"You are here because I wished it," she said.

He sought to disengage her arms from about his neck, had a panicky sensation that the thing was wrong, even if it were nothing but an obsession. She merely held him tighter, while he saw appear in her face a glint of cruelty as well as of immense yearning.

"Tell me that you love me," she said.

The words, while spoken very softly, had as much of anger as there was of pleading in them.

Said Carlton: "I do, but I'm pledged to Alice."

"Alice—you mean Berenice."

"I've always called her Alice," Carlton answered, still struggling.

"Berenice!"

There was such contempt and hatred in the inflexion that Carlton leaped to the defense—mentally, that is.

"As you will," he whispered; "but I am bound to her."

"Love me, anyway," came the answer in a voice that was softer and more savage still.

She was leaning over him. Her face lent itself to savagery—green eyes, straight, black brows, red lips that could be cruel and smiling all at the same time. How different she was from that other one—the girl with the fair skin, violet eyes, apricot hair.

But what was that riddle of the names—Alice or Berenice, Berenice or Alice? The strange name seemed somehow familiar, was stirring up a whole lake of latent memory. A moment, and he was asking himself not where the name Berenice came from, but how he had happened to refer to her as Alice at all.

Then he noticed something else that increased his dismay—baffled him, brought the hot blood surging once more to his face in an unmistakable blush. His enchantress had drawn back slightly, and he saw that his first impression of her was correct—she was attired in the scant, disquieting dress of ancient Egypt. With a calamitous lurch, he knew that it was the same with him—the old, familiar sensation that he had theretofore known only in dreams, the sensation of finding himself in a crowded ballroom half-clothed.

Instantly he was making a wild effort to recover himself, to achieve the truth, to wake himself up.

"Tell me," he faltered, "what has happened. You are Rhodopis—"

"You dare to speak like that to the Isis?"

He noticed that there was not so much of anger in the question as there was of amazement.

"Are you, indeed, crazed, as you suggested a little while ago?"

Before he could answer she had kissed him.

"Wake me up—I want to wake up," said Carlton. "I have seen the Woman of the Pyramid—know all that I want to know. I'll make a report on the facts—interesting stuff for the Society for Psychical Research—"

Said the woman: "My governor is out of his head. Poor Menni is, indeed, mad."

Carlton was sitting up, heart thumping, head hot.

"Menni—Isis—Berenice! I'm not mad. I'm under a temporary spell, perhaps."

Even while he was saying this he was perfectly conscious that he was somehow making a fool of himself. But he persisted—hopelessly, yet knowing that therein lay his only hope.

"Who are you?" he demanded thickly. "And who am I?"

He put the questions doggedly. The painted stone all round him, that cruciform couch covered with lion-skins, he himself in the scant attire of another age, then this demon-
esque, beautiful, terrible apparition just in front of him!

She had again drawn back slightly, was looking at him now with a shade of fearful amusement, yet yearning still.

"I am your queen, Netokris, who loves you. You are Menni, governor of the Double Palace. Calm yourself. Just now you called me Rhodopis. I know that you would not apply to me that name of reproach if you were in your proper senses. But I would be even Rhodopis for you. Call me your courtesan if you will. That is why I brought you here. There now—there—"

She had again drawn near to him—nearer, for she at no time had been far away, couldn't have been, even had she wished, the room was so small.

Over Carlton's senses there again swept like a silken pall that gulf of delicate, intoxicating perfume.

There was a ringing in his ears which gradually became the faint, clear music of an elfin orchestra. He did not resist now as he felt that pair of vibrant, bare arms again encircling his head.

His brain was still doing its best to recover old realities, to shake off the sense of delusion—a delusion which itself was instantly becoming more and more real.

The words came back to him: "*I am your queen, Netokris, who loves you. You are Menni, governor of the Double Palace.*"

It was this that troubled him—that the statement appeared increasingly reasonable and true—that he was not George Carlton—that there could be no such person—but that he was Menni himself, no less.

"And you will love me," came the tremulous whisper.

This time he answered: "But I am bound to Berenice."

"Love me, anyway," the woman answered, "or I'll kill you both."

CHAPTER VII.

BACK, FIVE THOUSAND YEARS.

CARLTON felt that there was no need for haste. His first sense of panic had disappeared by this time. In its place had come a feeling of wonder comparatively reflective and calm.

He was intensely alert to his physical sensations and his physical surroundings. This was lion-skin on which he reclined. Beneath it was the unmistakable feel of solid rock.

"This is an inner chamber of the pyramid," he said softly.

"Yes, my own."

"And you are Queen Netokris?"

"Most certainly, my dove."

"And just now you called me Menni."

"Yea, yea. Ah, let us talk of other things. When will the governor become the Osiris—sit with me on the Double Throne?"

Carlton's mind may have still been struggling, probably was. But it was like a swimmer who has sunk in deep water, has lost the power or the will to return again to the surface, who finds himself at home in the new element.

This was reality. All that had been was the dream.

Gently, but firmly, he freed himself, stood up, looked about.

"It is time that we were going," he said gravely, dispassionately. "Come!"

He scarcely dared look at the other, feeling that there was danger of another outbreak, that—"Love me, anyway, or I'll kill you both!"

He was conscious of the mantle of dignity he had put on. He was glancing about him with a certain air of appreciation and comprehension at this place where he knew he had never been before—admired the workmanship of the closely joined rock, the draftsmanship of the richly colored frescoes.

All the time he could feel the eyes of the woman upon him—knew that they were filled with wonder, also; wonder and baffled passion.

Netokris!

Where had he got the impression that she had lived five thousand years ago? Who was it that had referred to her as Aunt Rhodopis? He smiled inwardly now, in spite of his trepidation, at his having just now himself referred to her as Rhodopis.

Bold he must have been, indeed, to apply to his queen the name of the legendary Greek sorceress. That the epithet was just, even the most unscrupulous gossips of the time would barely whisper.

One of the painted blocks of stone swung upward in response to hidden

mechanism, left a yawning portal through which they passed into a tenebrous passageway—probably the one by which they had entered. They followed this for a while, their sandaled feet giving out but a faint whisper from the smooth rock. That same soft, diffused light which seemed to emanate from the woman who preceded him. Then another monolithic door.

This time they had left the silence behind them. Through the still air of the passageway there floated to them a faint, confused murmur of sound—voices that might have been reciting a litany, the cadence of a solemn chant, a barely perceptible ebb and flow of lesser noises which doubtless came from the outer world.

Presently they had entered a room a good deal larger than the first, and Carlton caught a movement of shadowy shapes, of men, young and old, scantily dressed in rich raiment—these he knew to be princes and courtiers—and of other men with shaven heads and dressed in spotless linen, some of them with leopard-skins hanging over their shoulders—and these he knew to be priests.

Once more he had taken note of his own costume; but it was not with the air of a man who is ashamed or surprised. He found it all right—that sort of long kilt that descended almost from armpits to ankles, an embroidered tunic which covered his shoulders but left his two arms free.

Physically, he was feeling immensely fit and comfortable, albeit slightly tired. But in his breast there was an unmistakable sense of depression—the feeling of one who has just recognized the first incident in some drama vitally concerning himself and those he loves.

He heard himself addressed as "Menni," and again as "my lord-governor," and knew that this was as it should be. He knew also that his bearing was at once simple and dignified.

Still, through it all, like the shred

of an all but forgotten dream, there ran the dim, receding recollection that he was not Menni at all, but a man named Carlton. No, that he had once been Carlton—doubtless in a dream; it couldn't be otherwise—and that he was Menni now—Menni, governor of the Double Palace which lay over there beyond the sacred lake—the City of the White Wall, in Memphis.

He tested himself, even while he was responding to the salutations of the others there—tested himself for knowledge of himself, his duties, his place in the world, the details of his environment. He called up a quick vision of the Double Palace, of the royal city surrounded with its "white wall" in the midst of the great capital of the Egyptian Empire, historic Memphis!

That something had happened to him he was perfectly aware. He was feeling just a trifle queer—perhaps the effect of an old sunstroke which he had suffered a couple of years previously.

Otherwise, he told himself, he wouldn't have this haunting subconsciousness of a blurred personality. But he had often talked with the priests—they being the only ones interested in erudition, anyway—about the phenomena of the human brain.

There were even those among them who had studied the mental processes of the "possessed," who had attempted to penetrate the vagaries of the insane. Even the sanest of mortals—Menni, the governor of the Double Palace, was fully aware—even the sanest of mortals were touched with glamor, with "possession," at times; dreamed awake, and things like that.

And in the depths of these meditations, even while he talked, was the growing conviction that his queen, Netokris, the Isis, had cast some sort of a spell over him. She was a woman of magic powers—every one knew that; had in her command not only the sorcery of Egypt, but the thaumaturgies of the Far South as well.

There was another moment when, in the eery light of the place, he felt the burning eyes of the queen upon him.

He gave no sign. He had never been a courtier, anyway; was determined to stick to his duty and let the rest take care of itself. He started for the open air.

CHAPTER VIII.

"ISIS ON EARTH."

THE pyramids pink in the morning light, just as they always are, to this day; but one of them ruddier than the others—the smallest and most beautiful of the three mighty ones, for it is sheathed in polished red granite from its pointed apex down to the mighty platform on which it stands.

Ruddier also is the face of the sphinx, of mighty Harmachis, which guards the necropolis of Memphis. for the same queen who sheathed the pyramid of Menkaura in red granite has likewise caused the face of Harmachis to be painted her favorite color.

Which is only natural, for she herself is the "ruddy-faced," and, according to every prince and courtier who gets a chance to whisper the fact, the fairest creature in the length and breadth of Egypt—of the world.

"Netokris, who united the two countries, Queen of the Diadem of the Vulture and the Snake, of abiding splendor, the golden Horus in woman's form, soul of gods, Queen of Upper Egypt and Queen of Lower Egypt, Isis of splendid life, daughter of Isis, Netokris!"

As the heralds took their places to the left and the right of the entrance to the Red Pyramid, and shouted the titles of her who was about to appear, other mourners in other parts of the necropolis came forward, some of them on the run.

The chance was too good to be lost. There had been a good deal of talk about the queen, even before her hus-

band died. There had been more since.

A wonderful woman, even if it hadn't been for the recent tragedy in her life which had left her alone on the Double Throne—young, fairly good-looking, passionate, yet marvelously well versed in the wisdom of the priests.

A widow, mistress of the world!

No wonder that she was being courted by every eligible prince in the empire! More than one woman was thinking of that as she hurried along the granite pavements of the city of the dead toward the door of the Red Pyramid whence Netokris was about to appear. Had she really been there mourning her husband, they wondered, or had she been casting spells to find out who the dead king's successor should be?

Heralds lined up to the left and right. A crowd of half-naked mercenaries with long staffs to keep the crowds back and to clear the way. A group of noblemen in sleeveless tunics of transparent linen. A gold and ivory litter covered with lion-skins, a dozen Nubians standing near to carry it.

The Nubians don't know that the princes have agreed among themselves to seize the litter, as if in response to spontaneous impulse, and carry her majesty back to the palace as a token that they themselves are her slaves. There isn't a man in the group who wouldn't give his right hand to be picked out as the queen's favorite.

The crowd was constantly becoming larger. Netokris always did like to keep people waiting.

"Been praying all night," whispered a middle-aged citizen from Memphis.

He was rich enough, as you could tell by his gold collar, albeit he wore little else than sandals and a thin linen skirt.

The woman at his side, dressed almost exactly the same, except that her hair was longer, done up in crinkly plaits and dyed blue, sneered up into her husband's face.

"Praying!"

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"You think evil, even of the gods," he retorted, then strained his eyes again in the direction of the pyramid door.

There wasn't a man in Memphis who wouldn't rather see the queen than his own wife, almost.

There appeared from the interior of the colossal temple a band of priests, their heads completely shaven, leopard-skins draped over their bare shoulders, indicating that they had been at their duties all night.

Another interval and a young man followed—all alone, very straight, his smooth face pale.

"Menni, the new governor of the palace," some one whispered in the crowd.

The name was taken up and repeated.

"Did you notice," one of the princes whispered, "how troubled he looks? The Isis must be displeased with him. I'm glad of it."

"So am I," hissed the other. "I'm not wishing him anything evil, but if he'd only step on an asp—"

Menni did look anything but cheerful, it must be confessed. What cursed luck had brought him out to the pyramid last night! He knew that the queen would be there. That was the hideous folly of it.

Had he remained in the city he would have evaded this perilous crisis, perhaps indefinitely.

Whence had come that impulse?

Then he knew. The Isis had been designing his entanglement for some time past. It filled him with mortification, but he admitted it. He had guessed the truth long ago from the way that she had looked at him out of those green eyes of hers.

He had felt it more than ever yesterday afternoon when she had looked at him again across a crowded room of the palace, had smiled at him that haunting, disquieting smile of provocation. And yet, in spite of it all, he had

gone out to the pyramid at night, he hardly knew why—the night of the new moon, which is always dangerous to those who would avoid dangerous sorcery.

He recalled how the queen had found him sitting at the side of the pyramid staring out across the desert—blue darkness everywhere, save for the golden lamps of the stars; he all alone in the universe. And then, she!

Netokris!

She had smiled at him, had lulled his senses with her uncanny powers. None but a witch, even if she were the Isis on earth, would use a perfume like that.

Great Ammon! Great Ptah!

Why hadn't he accepted the invitation to go along on that trip up the Nile? But at thought of Berenice there again crept into his mind the dim, faintly heard echo of that other name—Alice! And this other dream of his—phantasmagoria which returned to him there in the midst of the familiar sights and sounds around him like the shadows of another civilization—people oddly clad "all over," of mammoth boats with fire in them, of curiously frail houses, of waving banners such as he had never seen before in any dream!

Menni passed on down through the waiting crowd of slaves, attendants, and courtiers, speaking a word here, giving a direction there—a man of power, a favorite of the queen, according to all reports, but obviously distraught and heavy-laden.

"He has been watching all night," said the citizen of Memphis in the abbreviated skirt.

"Yes, he has," said his wife, the lady with the blue hair, with a fine inflection of irony. She laughed scornfully, but she likewise was on tiptoes by this time.

A cheer went up that drowned what the heralds had started to chant—*"Netokris, who united the two countries, Queen of the Diadem of the Vulture and the Snake, of abiding splendor, the golden Horus in—"*

About the door of the pyramid there was a swirl of movement—long-handled fans of ostrich feathers going up, a swaying of bodies as slaves, attendants and courtiers alike bowed low. Not a person in the group of all those near the royal presence who did not wilt with body and soul except that young governor of the palace with the thoughtful face. More than one prince—if not the others—noticed how stiff-necked he was and secretly rejoiced.

They would have been willing to wager good money that before very long Menni would indeed be stepping on that poisoned asp.

She stood there for a moment or two, perfectly conscious of all the eyes upon her and thoroughly enjoying it.

Netokris!

She couldn't have been more than twenty-five or so—slender, as graceful as a palm, a wonderful vision in silver and old rose. For she wore a silver skirt—as fine and transparent as though it had been woven of spider-web—embroidered with old-rose flowers; this and little else.

But she had managed to carry out the color-scheme with all the arts ever known to woman, then or since. Her face and her body had been lightly powdered, apparently, with crushed pearl. Toes and finger-tips and lips had all been stained with henna. Her eyes, naturally hypnotic and beautiful, had been penciled across her temples.

And odd and unforgettable and moving presence surely.

He wasn't the only one who did it, but the citizen from Memphis let out a little gurgling gasp at sight of her.

"You're like all the rest," his wife giped bitterly.

He didn't even hear her.

Netokris, with perfect composure, had gone forward to her litter, swooned gracefully down upon the piled-up lion-skins, and a moment later the giant Nubians, who were her bearers, had swept her shoulder high.

There were those in that foolish little conspiracy—to seize upon the litter

of the queen—who had seen from the first that such a compliment could not be delivered at the present time without a good deal of risk. They had seen her majesty look like that before—just as smiling, just as pleasant, and yet had sensed the sudden death that lurked about her.

But among those who hadn't noticed anything untoward in this was a young prince recently arrived at the court from Upper Egypt.

Impulsively he had sprung forward, seized the bar of the litter nearest to him, stood there for a second or two dazed by his own hardihood, recognizing too late that the others had not acted with him. For a moment he gazed up into the basilisk, painted eyes he adored.

Netokris let her eyes shift to a captain of the guard just back of him—a tall Assyrian—a huge fellow with a black beard and black, bold eyes, his shining yellow shoulders rippling in the young sunlight. She made a quick, slight movement with one of her painted fingers.

There was a flash of polished bronze and the young prince went down shuddering with a crushed skull, blood spattering the pavement.

The crowd—slaves, princes, citizens from Memphis, men and women, let out a loyal, exultant cheer—all except Menni, the governor of the palace—all cheered wildly.

"Netokris! Netokris! Soul of the gods! Isis on earth!"

CHAPTER IX.

PLOTS AND COUNTERPLOTS.

HAD the wide world been searched for the purpose a more striking contrast could not have been found—Netokris—refreshed, but still languorous after her bath and breakfast—and the creature who squatted on the floor there in front of her.

He was jet black, short and broad, had a huge and hideous head, made to

appear still larger by the crinkly mane of black outstanding wool. The blackness of his skin was accentuated by the white sheet he had drawn about him.

No one else was there. No one was visible in the garden below. The palace—a city of detached buildings in itself—was almost completely silent save for the all but inaudible splash of fountains, the occasional trill of imported birds, the barking of tame baboons, the snarling complaint of caged animals. The myriad sounds of Memphis, even, busy about its daily tasks, scarcely reached them save as an intermittent croon when nearer sounds were lulled.

Still early morning, but the air was warm—warm and fragrant.

The black squinted up at his mistress with the bright, unabashed eyes of an animal.

"You've killed," he grunted. "I smell blood."

Netokris, from her divan, looked down at him unwinkingly, unsmilingly.

"You tell me what is already old, Kashita."

"You killed young Ambos, he from the Province of the Fox," Kashita went on unperturbed, as though speaking to himself.

"Well, what of it?" the queen went on. "You've told me that I am to kill them all."

"All those who took part in the murder of Metemsa; but Ambos was not of these."

"He was ready enough to take Metemsa's place," sneered Netokris. "You should have seen the light in his eyes as he put his hand on my litter. By Typhon! Can't you bring that sort of a look, Kashita, into the eyes of Menni, the governor?"

An added glitter came into the eyes of the black.

"You'd better let Menni alone," he advised.

"What do you mean?"

Kashita returned the stare of Queen Netokris. It was easy to see that his position was an extraordinary one. Not

another man in Egypt would have dared to look at her—not only a queen, but a goddess, Isis on earth—like that!

"You came into my hands a nameless orphan," he said steadily. "False prophets and counterfeit magicians occasionally rise to the top here in Egypt, but in Ethiopia—the ancient Meroe—not there. Bless the day I took you in and began your education!"

"Do you remember the day I sent you out to the banks of the Nile with the spell which would bring the Pharaoh, Metemsa, to your feet? Who else could have brought the nameless orphan up to the level of gods and goddesses?"

"Metemsa killed by the jealous princes, you reign. We plan for them an early death to make your place solid. Your beauty, my wisdom—and you rule the world; yet you prate about a look in this fellow's eyes as though you were a fig-seller!"

Netokris looked long and steadily at Kashta. And Kashta looked back. It was he who again broke the silence.

"Oh, no you won't, my daughter," he said. "You won't kill Kashta."

Ordinarily the queen would have been asleep by this time. She preferred to sleep through the hot and drowsy day, reserving the nights for her pleasures, her meditations, and her magic. An extraordinary woman!

She admitted freely enough all that Kashta had said concerning the dominant part that he had thus far taken in her career; but, ever since her divine husband Metemsa was murdered, she had felt that in some way she had emerged from her old bondage.

Was she not, after all, Isis on earth, soul of the gods? There was other magic than that which Kashta had taught her—the younger, more highly evolved magic of the country she had come to rule. Why shouldn't she have not only power, but love as well? What would it profit her to rule the world if she couldn't rule the heart of the one man in it she desired?

For a long time after the black

priest of Ethiopia had left her she paced the floor of her bedroom.

Rather an open porch than a room—marble floor covered with thick rugs, a wide, striped awning on the open side, so rigged as to catch every breeze that stirred across the gardens.

With Menni at her side on the double throne, all their rivals safe in the tombs of their ancestors—that would be empire indeed! They would live as gods.

Netokris threw herself on her couch, tried to sleep; but the moment her eyes were closed she was once more living through the events of the night. At first, as she thought of how she had offered herself to this youth in the room under the pyramid, she was filled with anger and shame.

If she could only kill him, as she had brought down sudden death on young Ambos! But she knew that happiness lay not in this direction. That would be the last resource—a poor resource at the best, revenge instead of love.

She could at least kill Berenice—this yellow-haired slave to whom Menni thought he was bound. And then—

The thought, while it brought her a measure of consolation, merely increased the fever that was burning in her heart and brain.

Suddenly she sat upright, reflected a moment or two, then went over to an inlaid chest in one corner of the apartment and drew from it a blue scarf. This she threw about her head and shoulders. No disguise, but sufficient to warn all who encountered her that she was not to be seen.

She passed rapidly through an adjoining room where a score of women were lounging about—silent, some of them asleep in the tepid, perfumed air. A start or two, but beyond that none paid attention. It was dangerous to show attention when her majesty had put on the insignia of invisibility.

It was as though her invisibility was no mere fiction as she passed through the room beyond where members of

the guard were on watch—foreigners, all of them. Potentates have always preferred foreigners for a body-guard, and Netokris—or Kashta, at any rate—was no exception.

She descended a flight of stone stairs and crossed the deserted garden over which her bedroom looked and passed into a wing of the largest building inside the palace walls—a huge structure surrounded by a double row of lotus pillars painted red and green and gold, the Temple of Ptah.

Overhead was the fleckless blue sky. Round about was the dark-green shrubbery. The painted peristyle made a magical contrast.

Guards everywhere—black and brown for the most part, but here and there a group of fair-haired slaves from Macedonia. It was from Macedonia that her governor had come, most likely, for he also was fair-haired and gray-eyed, albeit he had been reared in a princely house of the lower kingdom.

Netokris had passed a dozen groups of guards, had descended two flights of stairs and entered a low stone corridor lined with statues of the gods. Before one of these statues—apparently a part of the wall itself—she paused and gave it a quick, caressing movement of her hand. The statue swung out from the wall, revealing a narrow door. As Netokris entered the statue swung back into place again, leaving no trace of where she had passed.

She found herself in a low chamber almost completely dark. What light there was came up from a small square opening in the floor, a few yards away.

Hastily, as though impatient to see what she had come to see, she ran forward toward this opening, knelt there and peered down.

CHAPTER X.

THE UNDERGROUND PALACE.

MENNI, governor of the Royal Palace, still distraught, still more or less

sick at heart, despite his well-known courage and resourcefulness, had accompanied the royal party back from the pyramid and, as usual when feeling like that, resolved to find comfort in work. There was plenty to do. Not since the days of the "great ones of Abydos," the founders of the empire, had the activities of "the one who lives at Memphis" achieved such a scale of magnificence.

The double palace of the double throne—symbolizing the upper and the lower kingdoms—had become a far-flung park in the very midst of the great city. It was a city within a city—a government within a government over which he ruled absolutely, under the life-giving radiance of the sun-queen.

In spite of the internal jealousies and treason which had led to the assassination of young Metemsa—a state of affairs which still continued, and would continue to last, no doubt, until the conspirators were put out of the way or otherwise pacified—the country was enjoying remarkable prosperity. Good crops at home, successful campaigns abroad. Grain, gold, spices, slaves pouring in.

Any one would have a hard time to convince the shopkeepers of Memphis that all this was not due to the rule of a virtuous queen.

It was this period of prosperity which had caused Metemsa to begin one of the most notable works of his reign. This was the great underground treasure-house. It was to be another wonder of the world. A pity, indeed, that the poor fellow didn't live to see its completion.

Down deep under the temple of Ptah, there in the midst of the "City of the White Wall," he had seen it in his imagination and given orders for its immediate building. A stupendous task! A huge hall to be dug from what had been the ancient bed of the Nile itself, under the enormous building already standing there.

There had been sacrificed the lives

of almost a thousand slaves in the preliminary work before Menni took charge, for the water kept seeping through and drowning the unfortunates every time there was a moment's delay at the pumps.

Menni wasn't an engineer. He was merely a student, then, interested in thoughts and dreams—even of slaves. And Menni had dreamed a dream one night of a race of men who pushed back water with air, just as the wind-god does on the sea.

That was how Menni came to be governor of the palace—not for having discovered a way to save the lives of slaves, but for having made the underground treasure-palace a possibility at all.

Almost completed!

Long, broad, and lofty. No one would have guessed, merely to look at it, that it was far below the level of the Nile, that it had been dug out of the alluvial mud. The grosser work had been finished. The masons were gone. Only the sculptors, the gilders, and the painters remained.

They worked by the light of a hundred lamps and torches—silently and at top speed, for the most part, as a dozen overseers paced up and down with sticks and an eye for shirkers.

Now and then a stick thwacked down on a bare back, and there would be a subdued snicker. The artist who was struck would work with sullen speed for the next ten minutes; but if his feelings had been hurt he failed to give a sign of it. As soon as the overseer was at a safe distance the victim would be grinning and whispering again with the rest.

It was into this great man-made grotto that Menni came on his daily visit, not long after his return from the pyramid. For a long time he stood near the entrance surveying all that had been done. In spite of its magnitude and growing beauty, the place somehow filled him with foreboding.

It was solemn enough, in that flickering light.

This vast hall, a hundred feet wide, a hundred feet high, two hundred feet in length; two mammoth statues, ten feet apart, occupying the middle space of each wall from floor to ceiling—Isis and Osiris, Osiris and Isis, each statue nearly sixty feet high, Osiris with the face of the murdered Metemsa, Isis with the face of Netokris, no less.

And, between these statues on the four sides of the room, flights of stairs leading to an upper level, but blocked instantly—at the will of any one who knew—by massive monoliths which could slide into place as softly as a lady's foot into her sandal. But it was of another marvel of the place that Menni thought as he stood there.

One of these colossi had been so arranged by Metemsa's chief engineer that by a mere touch of a certain lever it would swing outward from the wall and let the flood of the Nile rush in. A most ingenious idea! Royal treasures had been looted rather often in the past. Would they ever be looted again?

One by one the overseers came forward and saluted him cringingly. More than once an overseer had had his stick snatched from him and had felt it over his own back. Menni had never done such a thing. But you could never tell.

"How about it, Pshadou?"

"In another week, my lord, and the south wall will be ready."

"How about it, Nibamon?"

"In another ten days, my lord, and the east wall—"

"Too long! She who dwells in the palace must have this place in seven days. Draft twenty more artisans, if necessary."

"Your breath is my life, my lord."

Menni had come to the center of the great chamber, had again fallen into melancholy brooding. It was unlike him thus to give himself up to melancholy, however great the provocation.

He wished that Berenice was home from that trip she had taken with her old benefactress up the Nile. He felt

that she had a very large part in his concern. Netokris did not amuse herself by making empty threats. The queen was more likely to find her amusement in carrying her threats into execution.

Netokris!

He felt as though her eyes were upon him now. The feeling grew stronger and stronger, made him feel increasingly depressed and restless.

Once or twice he had lifted his eyes to a certain point in the roof of the chamber where there was a small opening, invisible to eyes unfamiliar with its whereabouts. He had seen nothing there. Yet, still that impression of being looked at.

He passed up and out from the chamber by the flight of steps nearest him and found himself in the corridor which completely surrounded the treasure-house at a higher level. It was all familiar ground to him.

Scarcely remarking his direction, but bent on a thorough investigation, he came to that other and lesser statue which likewise moved to the will of those who understood.

It swung back, and he stood there hesitant, realizing that his forebodings had not deceived him.

He had caught a breath of perfume, had heard a whispered word, and knew that, for the second time within the last few hours, he was in the presence of the queen.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TEAR OF GOD RA.

"I SUMMONED you," she said softly. "I'm glad that you thought enough of me to come."

He remained silent. It was the only thing that he could do. No one was supposed to have enough presence of mind, or of breath, even, when spoken to by the goddess, to reply unless expressly ordered to do so.

"Enter. Don't be afraid." Then, reading his thought: "We'll forget all

about what happened over in the pyramid."

He suspected that she was lying, but he felt a certain sense of relief at the prospect of no immediate violence. As the statue swung back noiselessly into place behind him, he had another moment of panic. It was as in that room in the pyramid—the same sultry darkness permeated by the woman's disquieting aura. But Queen Netokris had gone back again to her position at the opening in the floor. He followed her, stood over her as she knelt, looking down.

"I've been admiring your work," she said simply.

"Not mine," he managed to articulate, "but the work of Metemsa, the Osiris."

He held his breath. The queen did not answer, made a pretense of being absorbed in what she saw; but he could tell that his remark had been unpleasant to her.

"Kneel down here beside me," she resumed, after an interval, "so that you may also see. So we are to have it within a week? Do you know what I intend to do?"

"The ways of the goddess are inscrutable, O Isis."

"I intend giving a banquet here to celebrate my ascension to the throne. A marvelous banquet-room! Just think—far below the level of the Nile!"

"May your reign be long!"

"See, I shall have my dais there at the end where the gilders are at work. Ah, to think that I shall have to sit there all alone!"

Menni hesitated. The conversation was again taking a perilous direction.

"There are princes—unworthy of you, yet young, handsome, royal—who would gladly—gladly—"

Netokris had swayed slightly in his direction until her shoulder was touching his. He dared not move. Had he been able he would have given no sign, but his voice faltered in spite of himself.

She laughed, drew back again.

"Poor, foolish boy," she said, with just a touch of bitterness in her tones. "I didn't make you come up here to be tortured. Listen, I was moved by your faithful work, by your steadfastness. I have put you to the test. I have discovered the truth about you."

They were looking at each other through the dim light that came up through the floor. In spite of what she was saying, and the smile on her painted lips, Netokris might have been some beautiful deity of deception and hate.

"What you just said about the princes of the land is true," she went on. "Not one of them but would dishonor the memory of the Osiris by seeking to take his place. You, alone among them, have shown yourself to be faithful to the great memory. See what I am giving you as a sign of my favor."

She had taken a ring from the index finger of her right hand—a heavy circlet of gold in which was set a large sapphire. Even there in the twilight it glowed dark blue with a light all its own. The greatest sapphire of all sapphires!

Menni had drawn back with a movement of almost superstitious dread.

"The Tear of God Ra!"

"Yes, the Tear of God Ra," Netokris laughed. "You know the history of it?"

"I heard it when I was young."

"That the great God Ra wept this single tear when Osiris and Isis were married and sin on earth began! Take it. Wear it. And remember this—that when, some time soon, your life is in danger this will be the talisman to save you."

Menni still hesitated.

"But those who use it to save life—their own lives—thereby sacrifice things dearer than life, so I've heard," he panted.

Netokris had seized his hand in hers, had slipped the ring over his little finger.

"There are many things about the Tear of God Ra, my friend," she said. "that you can never learn except by wearing it. You wear it. I command you. Wear it night and day. When you go to sleep may it bring dreams to you. When you awaken may the dreams become visions; and may dreams and visions both be of—of—"

She leaned quickly forward, caught his face between her hands, and kissed him.

He was still kneeling there as she leaped quickly to her feet and made her way over to the hidden door. There came a flash of yellow light from the corridor outside, then darkness again.

Menni swore softly to himself, thought of Berenice, of the far places of the world. Couldn't he and she escape together? He had been honest in his administration of the palace; but he had been able to put a hundred or so gold collars aside in case of accident.

He looked down at the jewel on his finger. And that—should he be able to get out of the empire with it—would be worth many ounces of gold. But merely to look at it was to feel his courage melting out of him. Did it carry a curse? Did it mean that the wish the queen had expressed in putting it on his finger would some day come true?

It bit into his flesh like a pencil of ice. He started to pull it off, then desisted as he remembered the queen's command. There was still a fighting chance for life and happiness; but he was not fool enough to delude himself with the belief that that chance was brilliant.

He went back and up to the outer air and called two of the swiftest runners of the guard. They belonged to the company of scouts who kept in advance of the swiftest chariots whenever the Pharaoh, god or goddess, went abroad that way.

"Find out for me," he commanded briefly, "where I can see Baknik, high

priest of Ammon, without delay—the pyramid or his house.”

The men dashed away with the naked grace and speed of greyhounds. Scarcely had they gone than another messenger came up—this one of another sort, a cunuch from the apartments of the queen.

“From Isis on earth,” said the messenger as he brought his face to the ground and held up a piece of folded papyrus.

Menni took the message with a steady hand, in spite of a premonition that fate was adding but another stone to the tomb she was preparing for him. He was right. What he read was this:

Thou hast the tear-drop of Ra.
Keep it well, for there draws near the
night of the tear-drop of Isis.

For almost a minute Menni stared at the message, reading it over and over. Not being a priest, he had never been much of a reader. But there was no mistake.

Then comprehension burst upon him and he staggered a little. The night of the tear-drop of Isis!

That was the night that the Nile began to rise—the one night in the year when Egypt offered a human sacrifice—to the river in supplication of a full flood, as the forerunner of a prosperous harvest.

And the offering was always a maiden—young, pure, virtuous, like Berenice!

CHAPTER XII.

BAKNIK, PRIEST OF AMMON.

MEMPHIS was growing more rapidly than ever. Almost half a million inhabitants at the last census, and already the optimistic predicting a million by the next.

Menni noticed the changes as he passed along rapidly on foot. As usual, when making an excursion through the city, unofficial and more or less secret, he had put on a heavy wig of curled hair and a frankly false

beard which swung pendulous under his chin. He carried no insignia of rank, was unaccompanied, might merely have been one of the wealthy but despised merchant class.

He followed the line of the immense embankments of the Nile for a mile or two beyond the precincts of the double palace—the *Pharaoh*, which was to give its name to the sovereigns who resided there—passing along walled gardens for the most part, with here and there a double-storied house with its garden on the roof, in the style recently imported from Asia. Then he turned off to the left through a wide district inhabited by the poorer classes.

These classes always interested Menni. He even nourished some sort of foolish conception in his heart that they were as good as the rich and noble.

He smiled at the naked children who trooped round the mud-built houses. The roofs of many of these poor dwellings were more or less artistically decorated with egg-shells—making them cooler and more attractive to the eye.

Most of the men were away from home—some of them at work in the palace, perhaps—but the women were busy, weaving, grinding corn between two flat stones, making bricks of fuel from cow-dung and grass.

Most of the women had their foreheads and bare shoulders tattooed—a cheap and lasting ornamentation, like the egg-shells on their houses.

He came again into a neighborhood of the wealthy, where the road he was following again passed between garden-walls. One of the largest of these establishments was his destination—the home of his old friend, Baknik, priest of Ammon.

Like many of his kind, Baknik was one of the wealthiest men in Memphis—both wealthy and powerful, head of a princely family. His home was a sort of miniature of the royal palace itself—a crenelated wall fully fifteen

feet high surrounding the space of five or six acres, the entire interior occupied by several detached buildings three and four stories in height, highly cultivated courtyards between.

From one of these courtyards a giant, sacred acacia-tree reared its graceful head. It was covered with blossoms, filling the whole neighborhood with its fragrance.

Over a far corner of the wall rose the conical tops of three capacious granaries. Baknik was evidently prepared against a year of famine—a wise and sagacious man in every respect.

Menni swung through the wide gate of his friend's home, into a wide and lofty anteroom adjoining the servants' quarters, was greeted deferentially by Baknik's chief butler, who ushered him at once into the state reception-room and banquet-hall just beyond.

It was a large and lofty apartment—occupying two stories of the building—beautifully encased with beams and panels of painted cedar. Scattered about were numerous small tables and inlaid chairs of cedar and gold, of ebony and ivory.

It was here that the two friends greeted each other. A moment later they passed on through one or two other rooms, mounted a flight of steps, and came out on a broad balcony just under the branches of the flowering acacia.

Baknik, though enjoying a day of rest, was every inch the priest. His head had been freshly shaven. The exquisitely fine linen tunic he wore was immaculate, uncreased.

"Even bad luck is not altogether bad, since it brings you to see me," he said as he clapped his friend on the shoulder.

Even in his unofficial moments Baknik was a wonderful psychic. Those soft, luminous brown eyes of his were perpetually seeing things invisible to most people. It was that way now. There was no need for Menni to say that anxiety, as well as friendship, had

brought him on this long errand to the outskirts of Memphis.

Baknik was not yet forty years old, but he had had a remarkable career. An accepted priest at sixteen, a divine father at twenty, a full initiate at twenty-seven.

His face, while ascetic, was lively with sympathy and imagination. When those large, dark eyes of his were not veiled with mysticism they simply danced with intelligence and humor.

As Menni dropped into a chair he smiled gravely, heaved a sigh, held up his hand to show the sapphire ring.

"She who lives in the Double Palace!"

Baknik's face, still smiling, was none the less grave. He looked for a space at the ring in silence.

"Now isn't that just like her?" he murmured. "Now isn't that just like her? Do you know what happened to me the other day when I was summoned to the royal presence? She intimated that I could kiss her foot instead of the ground in front of her. Baknik was slow-witted. No, he couldn't take a hint. He kissed the ground, like any one else!"

In spite of his words, it was evident that Baknik had divined the seriousness of his friend's errand.

"What do you want me to do, my boy?"

"There is so much," Menni answered, "that I hardly know where to begin. Oh, why didn't you take the double throne when you had a chance? There isn't a priest or a prince in Egypt who wouldn't have swung round to you sooner or later. I could have given you the palace guards. I have them in my hand."

Again Baknik smiled that grave smile of his—no humor in it, just sympathy.

"I am lazy," he said, waving his hand around him. "This is world enough for me, empire enough—a fairly comfortable home, two of the dearest wives in the world. I'm lazy—"

"Tell me," said Menni; "are you too lazy—I know you're not—to help me, dear old friend? If there is a man in Egypt who needs the aid of such powers as yours, I'm he."

At this reference to his powers a gradual and beautiful change came into Baknik's fine face. It kept its sympathy, but its quality of ascetic mysticism increased. His eyes, fixed on Menni's, became more somber still.

He had drawn up another chair and seated himself just in front of his friend.

"I know it," he said. "You don't have to tell me. Last night I was in the seventh chamber of the pyramid—high up, high up, where even such as I can see without error. I had gone there to study anew the movement of Orion. But it was not that which I saw. Instead, I saw you and the Pharaoh. She was thinking of you. And you were thinking of Berenice."

"Where is she now?" Menni whispered.

Baknik closed his eyes. His face had gone whiter than it usually was. His voice also came in an almost inaudible whisper.

"I see her on the Nile at Abydos. She and her pious mistress have just visited the tomb of Menes. She buys a tame rabbit from a child. They enter their boat while the slaves make ready to cast off for the journey back to Memphis."

"Is she well?"

"She is well, but she is homesick, thinks of you—thinks of you even now, as she kisses that little rabbit she has just bought. Ah, see, the rabbit has leaped from her arms, has made its way ashore. The children there try to recapture it; but it is well away among the reeds."

The priest opened his eyes. His face was still pale. He was still under the influence of his "concentration," but he smiled slightly.

"Dear Baknik," said Menni, "you are good. But these—these are what stabbed my heart."

He held out the ring and the fragment of papyrus.

CHAPTER XIII.

INTO THE FUTURE.

FOR a long time Baknik had been seated there, motionless, his eyes again closed, giving no sign of life except his soft and rhythmic breathing.

A chariot stormed by in the road beyond the garden-wall. From the "women's part" of the establishment came occasional gusts of singing and laughter, accompanied by very amateurish playing on a harp. The acacia-tree was swarming with bees.

One of these bees, heavy with pollen, winged its way noisily down to Baknik's face and lit there, walked across one of his closed eyes to his forehead, remained there a while, then flew away again.

The priest had noticed none of these things. He had withdrawn himself from the world as absolutely as though he had once more entered the "seventh chamber" of the pyramid where even such as he could "see without error."

But in his hand he still held the ring and the papyrus. He was conscious of these.

"She who lives in the Double Palace is surrounded by an atmosphere of sudden death," said Baknik very softly, after a sigh, as though he were patiently explaining something which was perfectly obvious to him. "It was always that way—sorcery, black magic."

The angel of death was standing at her elbow when Metemsa found her bathing on the banks of the Nile and determined to make her his queen. Metemsa didn't know that he was also wooing the angel of sudden death. He didn't know that she sent the dark angel to follow him when she put this ring on his finger.

"The Tear of God Ra!

"Well named. Ammon-Ra will shed many tears because of this. The god wept as the young Pharaoh walked

forth with this blue gem on his finger while the assassins waited."

"Who were they?" Menni whispered.

"Those who aspire to take Metemsa's place—the princes Tentares, Saïtes, Seti, Amasis, Aï—"

He named half a dozen others while Menni listened breathless. He knew them all intimately, although they were not friends of his.

All of them had been frequenters of the palace while the late Pharaoh was still alive, were among the loudest mourners when the body of the royal victim was found riddled with dagger-thrusts.

But Baknik continued to speak, faster now, with no trace of emotion. He was as one who reads rapidly from an invisible book.

"Netokris herself took the gem from the finger of the Osiris, even while she then thought of the next bridegroom of the pale angel; and her thought was of Menni, governor of the Double Palace."

Baknik said this as though his friend had not been present at all. Menni, for his part, squeezed the arms of his chair a little tighter.

"Him she would have share with her the double throne; but in her sleep that very night—when her double went forth from her physical body to search him out—she found that his double was guarding the sleep of that fair Greek slave known as Berenice. By her arts of black magic Netokris brought Menni to the pyramid, but the pure love of a man for a good woman is always stronger than black magic. Thereupon Netokris gave the Tear of God Ra to Menni."

Baknik's eyes fluttered; he stirred slightly, as though he were about to "come back."

"And is Menni to die?" the governor of the Double Palace whispered, pronouncing his own name without a tremor.

"He is to die now, very soon," said Baknik, as he obviously sank deeper

into the silence of complete concentration. "He struggles in the waters of Father Nile, in the waters of our sacred Hapi, God of the Fish."

"And Berenice?"

The blue sapphire had slipped from Baknik's finger to the rug beneath his feet, but he still held the papyrus. He was again reading the words that Netokris had written on it.

Thou hast the Tear-drop of Ra.
Keep it well, for there draws near the
night of the Tear-drop of Isis.

There was a moment's pause.

The bees hummed in the acacia-tree. A fish-pedler let out his doleful cry from the road outside the garden-wall. Again from the women's part of the establishment came laughter and music.

Some one was playing the harp so badly that the others were making fun of her. Yet all of these things came even to Menni as from another world.

He had just heard his own death-sentence, as surely as though it had been pronounced by Horus.

"And Berenice?"

"She also will die this present year in the waters of the Nile, and will do so happily—a fair and lovely offering to the Nile before the night of the Tear-drop of Isis."

Menni tried to speak. But for a moment or two, while the perspiration appeared in small drops on his forehead, his voice failed him. Baknik was repeating softly some stanzas from the hymn of the Nile. Menni had heard it before—a solemn and beautiful chorus across the black waters on the night that the Nile began its annual rise.

The great, mysterious river, the maiden arrayed as for a wedding, heart-chilling eddies in the brown waters where the crocodiles and great fishes lurked—

Vain are all images of him:
He reveals not his form;
No temples can contain him:
Thy law prevails;
No councilor penetrates his heart;
O drink away our tears!

"Drink away our tears! But Berenice?"

"Happy! Happy!" the priest went on with perfect tranquillity. "Both she and Menni perfectly happy, though there be tears and anguish before their earthly light goes out. It is a great thing about tears and anguish that, once past, they are gone as irrevocably as the eaten cake. Once drained, the cup of bitterness is empty until the gods choose to fill it again."

"And after we have drained our cup?"

Into the solemnity that had dropped upon Menni like a pall there had come a stain of brighter color—of some new and formless hope.

"Death is only an appearance," said Baknik. "It only exists in the minds of those who have not seen Osiris. No, Menni and Berenice meet again on this earth in a land which is not Egypt nor of Egypt. They know each other and love again, and again they pass into the land of the living shadows. Again they meet—"

"On earth?"

"On earth—under the same stars, the same moon, the same sun. The same are the eternal gods, as well, although called by other names; even as Menni and Berenice are called by other names."

"What are they—our new names?"

There was a gentle, pitiful little quaver this time in the young governor's voice.

Over Baknik's placid face there appeared a slight ripple of difficulty. He was struggling with unfamiliar sounds.

"Aleece—Aleece—that is Berenice!"

"And you see her?"

"Beautiful, even as she is to-day—fair skin, delicate pink under her violet eyes; hair the color of the inside of a ripening fig. Oddly dressed—swathed like a mummy, though the day is warm—and on her head a diadem of straw—"

"Not dead!"

"No, not dead; but smiling and

happy. See, she has just bought a little rabbit from some urchins on the bank. She thinks of her Menni as she kisses it—feels a little homesick. She and the older woman who accompanies her go aboard the great boat that awaits them—a great white boat with fire in it—"

Baknik had again paused, rapt in the contemplation of some new mystery. Menni was looking at him with moist eyes. He had not altogether comprehended the last things that were being said; thought, perhaps, that his great and good friend had traversed some dream-cycle and was back again to that previous vision.

The governor of the Double Palace stirred, reached out, and took the papyrus from the unresisting fingers.

The eyes of Baknik fluttered open—deep, mysterious, the eyes of one who has gazed, like Harmachis, the sphinx, into the depths of eternity.

CHAPTER XIV.

BERENICE COMES BACK.

A LADY of great wealth and perfect respectability, but of no great consequence. That would be a fair, albeit somewhat brutal description of the rather more than middle-aged Nefru, who was making her annual trip along the Nile, from Memphis to Abydos, and back again.

She was a widow, but still kept up a considerable establishment in the outskirts of the capital, though, ever since her husband's death, she had spent more than half the time aboard her large and comfortable barge.

Up to Abydos by easy stages, making long stops here and there to visit her own and her late husband's relatives, the numerous slaves of the good lady—even the twoscore oarsmen—enjoyed these outings as much as their mistress did.

It was always regarded as more or less of a scandal among the younger set—the way that Nefru indulged her slaves.

But Nefru was old-fashioned. She was sprung from a generation which still considered its slaves more as children than as chattels. She had no patience with new-fangled standards which made it smart and proper to cut off the head of a valuable slave for a spilled cup of beer or other such trifles.

Her overseer hardly ever used his stick. Her bargemen were fat and happy—as fat and sleek and happy as so many sacred hippopotami.

Her *almahs*, or singing maidens, didn't have to be coerced into music. They sang of their own accord. They took their own advice:

Make a good day;
Life will not stay
But a moment.
Make a good day,
Your tomb is gray—
Gray and gloomy forever.

But, of all this happy, half-spoiled company, there was one more favored than all the rest. This was the slave-girl Berenice.

Nefru, with no children of her own, had always looked on Berenice with doting eyes ever since she had bought her, fifteen years ago, when Berenice had been "thrown in as good measure," along with her mother, who had been brought a captive from some victorious raid beyond the waters of the Mediterranean.

The tender-hearted old Nefru had known well enough that the woman she had bought would not live very long, anyway. Even then her eyes had been on the child.

Perhaps it had been as her cousin—a priest attached to the pyramid of Cheops—had said—that this child and she were related through their "doubles"—that is to say, psychically. Her cousin had even gone so far as to predict that the day would come—in the distant unrolling of the papyrus of the ages—when the little girl herself would be the mistress and Nefru the slave.

With a contented smile on her fat and kindly old face, Nefru thought of

this now as she reclined on the high quarter-deck of her barge and watched Berenice through half-closed eyes.

The barge was drifting slowly down the broad bosom of the Nile, the oarsmen giving just enough force to their long sweeps to give the helmsman steerage-way.

In spite of the fact that the mistress was resting—supposedly asleep—there hung about the craft—as there hangs about a bee-hive—a buzz of busy satisfaction.

There were possibly sixty people aboard—slaves every one of them, men and women, except Nefru and her captain. But if any of them suffered from his bondage, he showed no sign.

There was a tinkling of harps, now and then a light quaver from a double flute—a beautiful, rippling chord—a murmur of lazy, babbling conversation.

Nefru, her eyes very bright in spite of the half-closed lids, beamed satisfaction.

The quarter-deck was very high, where it could catch every breeze set up by the motion of the craft, and was shaded by a broad awning of linen striped blue and white.

Berenice toyed with one of the numerous kittens aboard the boat—a kitten in whose fluffy, graceful little body perhaps—so Nefru reflected—there possibly dwelt the soul of a common ancestor, her own and this girl's whom the gods had cast into her keeping in lieu of other children.

Nefru, naturally pious, was always given to reflections like this when returning from a visit to the tombs of the "great ones of Abydos."

They were approaching Memphis. For a long time now they had been able to see the dim, blue tips of the pyramids over the tops of the fringing palm-trees.

The river was becoming more crowded. All sorts of craft were about, from the tiny, reeking dugouts of lone fishermen, squatting naked, motionless, and patient, to an occasional great war-galley—such as the tax-

gatherers of the government used in visiting the Upper Kingdom, or even for traversing the Mediterranean.

There were a good many picnic boats as well—boats hired by the day and filled with noisy young men and hoydenish women for the most part, sending out a reek of beer and ribaldry.

"What is this day?" asked Nefru with disapproval, turning her head slightly in the direction of her captain, who stood just back of her near the helm.

"The first day of Thoth, the Ibis, excellency," the captain answered.

"I detest holidays," said the gentle old Nefru. "Order the women to stay to their quarters and draw their curtains. Just listen to that. It's scandalous!"

A particularly villainous barge was drifting past filled with riotous young stone-masons out for a day. At sight of the *almals* in Nefru's barge they had sent up a cheer of delight, accompanied by a storm of compliments and invitations.

In the mean time, in response to a spoken word of command, the oarsmen had struck into a swifter rhythm, the overseer on duty setting the time by beating on the mast with the heavy baton he carried.

Berenice had dismissed the kitten to its questing mother, had come over and knelt at Nefru's side. The love and trust that existed between them was indicated by the way the girl had impulsively brought one of the old lady's hands to her lips, and still clung to it as she gazed off down the river toward Memphis.

The girl was everything that Baknik had described her; everything, even, that Menni had pictured her in his mind's eye—slender, radiant, soft-eyed, her fair complexion only slightly darkened by her long sojourn on the river.

A pearl of a girl, if there ever was one!

Just eighteen! It was at that age that one girl out of all Egypt was

chosen every year for her beauty and virtue to be the bride of the Nile. Thought of that also came to Nefru as she looked at Berenice.

The thought brought with it a little spasm of—was it anxiety or hope? She could not tell which.

She had often thought of that. It would certainly be a very great honor—the very highest possible tribute—should the Pharaoh select this child of her own house for such earthly immortality. And yet, and yet, would she ever be able to live—would she care to live?—if Berenice, the only daughter she had ever known, were taken away from her, even under such glorious circumstances as that?

Her old heart had begun to quiver a little; a little moisture had appeared in her eyes—such reflections are so terribly real to some old ladies like Nefru—when Berenice, who had been staring ahead down the expanse of shining river, let out a little cry of joy, blushed like a small cloud at dawn, attempted to conceal her emotion by kissing Nefru's withered cheek.

"The governor's barge," she faltered happily.

CHAPTER XV.

"MY SON AND MY DAUGHTER."

BERENICE was not mistaken. Was any girl, in similar circumstances, ever mistaken? Not only was it the official barge of the governor of the Double Palace, but Menni himself was on board. Menni, as tall and straight and handsome—as distinguished and foreign-looking as ever! Yet changed.

Both Berenice and Nefru noticed it as, in response to an interchange of signals, the two barges came to a drifting halt, side by side, and the young governor came aboard.

Nefru had always admired the young man. She would, perhaps, have preferred him to be more of an Egyptian and less of an outlander, but he had even overcome this prejudice.

Besides, ever since Menni had begun to show marked attention to Berenice the old lady had begun a quiet investigation of Menni's standing and antecedents. By ways best known to herself she had learned that his habits were exemplary, that he had not a few gold collars put away in reserve against the proverbial "dry year."

Menni, with a single devouring glance of his gray eyes into the violet eyes of Berenice, had knelt in front of the couch where Nefru, with her perfect, old-family breeding, still reclined, had pressed the dowager's hand to his head and heart.

"My thoughts have been with you."

"Doubtless," the old lady commented, with a good-natured smile at the fiction. Then more gravely: "You have been working overmuch, I fear. You should have followed us to Abydos."

Menni made a little gesture of despair. He was again on his feet. Nefru, now that form had been recognized, permitted herself to sit up.

"Berenice, child," she said, with assumed severity, "how can you linger there when we have as our guest the governor of the Double Palace?"

As the old lady pointed her wit with a sly smile, Menni seized the permission to turn again and look into the violet eyes lifted to his own.

Berenice was blushing again—a mere shell-pink flush this time—but her gaze was steady. If a look can ever be translated into words—and a good many people think that such a thing might be possible—the words, in this instance, would have been, "My beloved, I have longed for you so, I am longing for you now," or something like that.

His own brief look must have meant the same.

Then he had taken her tapering fingers into his, had repeated—more lightly, this time—the formality of bringing them to his head and his heart.

Pharaohs had done as much where

slave-girls were concerned. Why shouldn't he—a mere governor of the royal palace! Besides, wasn't it true—that anonymous inscription on the rocks at Elephantine—that all men, even kings, are born slaves—slaves of consequence?

"Dismiss your barge," said Nefru. "We shall bring you safely to the city."

"The Osiris lengthen your days!" cried Menni quickly. "By Bisou! That official barge is getting on my nerves!"

He turned away to give the command. Nefru turned quickly to Berenice.

"Hasten, my gazelle," she said, "and tell Mimout and Banisit to serve the cakes and wines—the *almahs* to sing the Blue Lotus Song."

As Berenice flitted away, only too happy to serve, even in this small way, the pleasure of the man she loved, Nefru turned again to her distinguished guest.

"You bring me bad news."

"Frightful."

"It concerns—"

"Berenice."

"You realize my evil dreams—I slept, you know, at Abydos."

"Don't be discouraged. I have a plan. I'll tell you all."

It was pitiful to see the pain and the doubt in Nefru's eyes, as she looked up at him seeking to frame the question she desired most in the world, and feared most in the world, to ask. Menni understood.

"Not now," he whispered. "There she is again."

He had heard behind him the quick, light step of Berenice as she returned. At the same moment there came from the lower deck a swift, sweet cadence of women's voices accompanied by flute and harp.

It was a song particularly suited to the Nile, with a pulsing rhythm in perfect harmony to the recurrent glimmer and spray of the flashing oars.

Berenice, without speaking, had

sunk down at the side of Nefru on the divan. The governor of the Double Palace, by shifting the position of his chair ever so little, brought his right hand close to hers. There was no sign in his abstracted eyes to indicate to the fond Nefru what was doing.

But Menni had put out his little finger until it came in contact with the smooth and tepid point of Berenice's little finger.

They had done that the very first time that they had seen each other. It was like the mystic symbol of recognition—the secret “grip”—of an ancient fraternity of which he and she were the only members in the world. A slight smile—the first in days—spread over Menni's face, brought back to it a look of boyishness which seemed, a little while before, to have been lost forever.

Some old women have wonderful intuition—especially wonderful where young lovers are concerned. That is perhaps the one field of scientific research in which women will always be preeminent. Their knowledge, sometimes, is almost uncanny.

That is the way it was with Nefru now. How, otherwise, while still stunned by that hint of disaster, could she have divined that Menni and Berenice were exchanging that mystic grip—touching finger-tips, and have thought of the one most appropriate thing in the world that she could say?

It was apparently *apropos* of nothing.

“Your excellency will be the first to hear a bit of family news,” the old lady said, her eyes still misty. “It is a little premature, for, though the papyrus has long been written, it has not yet been recorded in the temple. But Berenice, whom I dearly love, is henceforth my daughter.”

“Oh!”

The exclamation had leaped from the lips of the girl. Her hands were pressed to her bosom. Then, again:

“Oh! Will that—will that change anything?”

There was as much fear as joy in the exclamation.

But Menni had also cried out—a subdued little cry in which there was nothing but unadulterated joy.

“Your daughter, O Nefru!—your daughter Berenice! Oh, can I wait longer to tell you that I also love her dearly?”

The barge was now speeding along through the afternoon sunlight—other craft making way for it; for, just behind, followed the official galley of the governor of the Double Palace. As the rowers quickened their stroke the music of the harpists and the *almahs* also quickened—became a joyous chant with just enough variety in it to keep it from becoming monotonous.

A magical hour, if it had not been for that overhang of tragedy! Every girl, however beautiful and full of life, has her ghostly double. Every Memphis has its city of the dead. Every sunbeam has its shadow. Every pure joy has death for a background.

“Your excellency—” Nefru began, her eyes now frankly tearful.

Menni broke in impetuously.

“Call me son!”

“Oh, to have a son and a daughter!”

Slaves had appeared with goblets of various kinds of wines and platters of cakes.

Regardless of them, or of any one else who might be looking, Menni had thrust an arm about the quivering shoulders of the girl, had drawn her close.

“Betroth us! Betroth us!” he whispered, as he lifted his face unashamed. “It isn't too late. Why shouldn't she be my bride, O Nefru, rather than the bride of the Nile?”

The boat swayed slightly to the movement of the oarsmen. The joyful music pulsed up from below. They were passing now through Memphis Lake—the city of the living on one hand, the city of the dead on the other.

The *almahs* had swung once more into that favorite refrain of theirs:

Make a good day;
Your tomb is gray,
Gloomy and gray forever.

Neiru had seized a crystal goblet from one of the waiting slaves, had murmured some half-articulate phrase over the wine that it contained, poured a little of this into her hand, touched the foreheads of each of them with her moistened fingers, then threw the goblet and its contents with an unerring hand into the lake.

The scene must have had more witnesses than even the principals had suspected. For, up from a hundred throats, there rang the old prayer to Ammon-Ra to make this thing eternal.

CHAPTER XVI.

MAN OR THE GOD.

THERE was good, hard logic, as well as sentiment in the whirlwind proposal of Menni, and the sudden betrothal to the freed-woman and adopted daughter of the wealthy old Nefru. It is true that he had acted against the advice of the best friend he had in the world—apart from Berenice and Nefru—the high priest and adept Baknik.

According to Baknik, the events which he had already seen on the painted canvas of the future were as immutable as things which had already been impressed with the seal of time.

For Baknik and his strange, great brethren of the Secret Doctrine, there was no past nor future, anyway, except in the limited and deceptive consciousness of ordinary mortals. They held firm to the strange belief that both the day of a thousand years ago and the day of a thousand years hence were but different aspects of the eternal Now.

But Menni was not an adept. He was still a man—very much of a man—with all a man's young passion, hopes, and determinations still strong within him.

And had not Baknik himself declared that the love of a man for a woman might be the greatest force on earth?

He knew the ancient law. He had been reared under it. He might have been born in distant Macedonia, as it had been told of him, but he was none the less an Egyptian. And he knew that not even the Isis on Earth, she who dwelt in the Double Palace, could change this—the law that the annual Bride of the Nile be an unmarried virgin.

With Berenice as his bride, this danger, at least, would be exorcised. Perils enough would remain, but not this.

He had pursued his dream even further.

With Berenice as his bride, why couldn't he and she do as he had already half planned—escape out of the empire altogether?

He and the aged Nefru remained together on the roof of the latter's house that night long after Berenice had bade them a tender good night. The entire household had sunken into slumber except for the trusted slave whose duty it was that night to guard the outer door. And even he was dozing, most likely.

There was a young moon, only a few days old, but the night was filled with a refulgent glamour. From where they sat they could see the broad bosom of the sacred lake—every great star reflected in its mirrorlike surface almost as brightly as the moon itself.

Now and then a boat passed with some returning revelers, but even their maudlin hoots and songs were mellowed into tunefulness.

"But, oh, my boy, to tamper with the edicts of the gods!"

There was a sort of woful resignation in Nefru's voice.

"The edict has not yet been issued," said Menni stoutly. "Besides, I tell you that I am a man. And what is a man if he is not an immortal? and what is an immortal if he himself is not a god?"

Love and anguish had combined to carry him to a higher plane than the one on which he usually thought, though he was more of a thinker, even in ordinary times, than most of the young men of his rank and acquaintance. Not for nothing had he been born in Macedonia.

Nefru now looked at him with admiration, almost with hope.

"But even if you attempted to carry out this wild plan?"

"There are a thousand men, both bound and free, in the palace this very night who would risk their life's blood to help me on my way.

"And look at the river. Do you suppose that Father Nile could bend his majesty to jealousy? No, not even though I robbed him of Berenice. He would be the first to aid us on our flight to happiness. A day, and not a galley of the imperial navy could catch up with us.

"The world is large. I have questioned every foreign slave and traveler, almost. I ever came across. Egypt—I say it with all reverence—isn't the whole world. Far beyond the Red Sea, out through the Gate of Tears, there is another empire greater even than this—an empire of wonderful forests and countless cities incrustated with gold and rubies. Beyond that is another empire still—an empire which extends to a place where the Star of the North is overhead."

"You speak of the kingdom of Osi-ris, where only the souls go," Nefru whispered. "It lies over against the end of the milky way. Oh, think," she exclaimed, shaking her head—"think of the apes who catch men in their nets!"

"No, no, my dear Nefru. I merely speak of going where other men have gone. Berenice and I could make ourselves a happy home. A little while, a change—"

"Softer; I thought I saw some one in the road over there behind the sycamore."

"And by and by," Menni went on,

sinking his voice to a whisper, "you would join us there and pass a sweet and peaceful old age.

"I am too old to leave the Nile. Old trees, my son, can't be transplanted."

"But, I tell you"—fiercely—"conditions at the Double Palace cannot last as they are at present."

"Speak not of the Isis," Nefru whispered. "It is dangerous—more dangerous than to touch an asp. I have seen those who died from it."

Menni laughed bitterly.

"Mother, you listen to a man—your son, so help me Ammon Ra—who is condemned to death; who fears not death—only the sorrow of those he loves. Berenice I love. You I love. But life without the things that the heart clings to—that I do not love. I defy even the one who lives in the Double Palace!"

It must have been that the trusted old slave whose duty it was to watch the outer gate that night had dozed. At any rate he had paid no attention as there slipped past him a black fantom as illusive as a shadow.

Kashta, the Ethiopian minister of Netokris, was justly feared. Not only did he possess very real magical powers. He was also possessed of the most complete system of spies then existent in the world. Some of them were magicians like himself—skilled in hypnotism and other occult arts.

How otherwise could they disappear at will, make closed doors to open, hear conversations which had been breathed in the faintest of whispers behind stone walls?

At any rate a shadow had come and gone while Nefru and Menni talked, and all shadows have ears when things are being said which the speaker would have unheard.

The moon had disappeared long since into the desert. The boats filled with returning revelers had all passed for the night, it seemed. The great stars were still reflected—each one a moon—in the unruffled waters of the sacred lake.

Tears had been shed by Nefru. It was hard to find a son and a daughter on one day only to lose them again at the dawn of the next. Still that would be preferable to seeing them pass forever into the black night of the tomb. Alive, she might find them again. Dead, who could tell? She had never felt in her heart of hearts that she was to see her late husband again.

Menni had risen to his feet. In the four hours still left of the night there was much to do, though he had begun his preparations even before he had spoken to Nefru and Berenice. He had begun to lay his tentative plans from the moment that he had left Baknik's house. He knew where he could find both galley and men.

A marriage at dawn, and then away.

He was still standing there, voicing some sort of a wordless prayer, perhaps, to Father Nile, when he was startled to hear the tread of an approaching company of foot soldiers.

His trained ears told him that they were guards from the palace. He could tell that by the characteristic scrape of spear and shield.

Then even Nefru noticed it.

She had risen to her feet. He put a strong, sympathetic arm about her.

The company was in the road below—had drawn up in front of Nefru's gate.

CHAPTER XVII.

NEFRU OFFERS A SACRIFICE.

It took but a flash of thought, a glint of time measureless even in seconds, for Menni to recognize the truth. His long experience at the Double Palace had made him familiar with the direct methods there in vogue. When the Pharaoh spoke there was no questioning, no appeal. It was an edict straight from not only the supreme power on earth, but the ruler of heaven as well.

An order had gone out for his arrest.

In that flash of thought it was not he himself who was uppermost, however. It was Nefru, the gentle old lady at his side, and, after her, Berenice. That they also were implicated, that he had precipitated ruin upon them, was the overwhelming fact.

Without delay he had turned instantly to Nefru—looked down into her frightened eyes.

"They have come for me," he said steadily, reassuringly. "Don't be alarmed."

But she was not to be deceived.

"My son," she whispered, "you have touched the asp—the sacred *ureus* of the crown, and it has struck."

"No, no. It is merely a summons from the Double Palace."

Even while he spoke he could hear the clear, commanding, harsh words of the captain of the guard.

"In the name of Netokris, who united the two countries, Queen of the Diadem of the Vulture and the Snake—"

This, and then the tremulous, abject words of the slave at the gate protesting that his house and all who were in it belonged, body and double, to the Isis of the Double Palace.

The captain of the guard spoke the name of Menni. The slave did not know—so help him, Ptah, Isis and Osiris, and the shades of the great ones of Abydos! But he would go—

"Did you not hear how he pronounced your name?" asked Nefru, with her eyes still uplifted to those of the governor of the Double Palace. "He spoke it not as one who comes to do you honor."

Menni caressed the old lady's head with his hand.

"Even so, mother, I must hasten down to meet them. See, whatever has happened, I swear to you that I still have influence: can still make the dice roll right. Farewell, I go!"

Still Nefru clung to him. Fright had disappeared from her face utterly. Instead, there was thought—swift, concentrated. She was too old for

panic, had seen too much. After all, Menni and Berenice were nothing but babes compared to her—her babes, and she would save them.

"You must not go," she thrilled, clutching his tunic. "It would be the dungeon—death! I know. Wait!"

She was still thinking hard. Menni sought, gently but firmly, to release himself. The guard had entered the garden, had surrounded the house.

"A moment's delay," cried Menni, swiftly but softly, "and it will mean your destruction and that of Berenice. You harbor an enemy of the Isis! For the love of Ammon-Ra, release me: let me hasten before it is too late!"

"No," Nefru cried again. "Listen! There is yet a way. When my husband, Timaos, was yet alive, he had constructed a secret passage. You know, at one time, he was in trouble. You and Berenice can escape that way."

"And you?"

"I'm old!"

From the garden below there came the sound of a brief scramble, a blow, a scream.

"The voice of Tano—my gate-keeper. They have killed him!"

Had anything else been needed to show that the guards from the palace were on an unfriendly errand, this would have been enough. The old Tano, faithful to his instincts, had doubtless returned to say that the man they sought was not within, had answered for this whitest of lies with his life.

The old Nefru had cast her arms into the air, gazed up at the sky.

"O gods of Kem, do with me as you will: I pledge you my soul for eternity: but keep my children!"

She was still speaking as Menni ran to the doorway of the stairs which led from the roof down into the interior of the house. His straining senses had noticed elements in the sounds below, immediately after the death-cry of Tano, which abolished his last shred of hesitation.

A company of half wild mercenaries at the gate of a rich, private dwelling filled with everything from gold to women; the gate-keeper murdered; the very nature of their errand sufficient authority for the commission of all sorts of excess—even were such authority needed!

Again he thought of Nefru, of the sleeping Berenice, of all the other members of the household—happy, faithful slaves, boys and men, girls and women, all unconscious of the appalling fate that even then was hovering over them. He thought of these things, but it was subjectively.

In his arms, his whole quivering body, he felt the strength of a dozen men. As he dashed down the stairs he looked, with brilliant, all-perceptive eyes, for some weapon.

Then there appeared before him a huge shadow of a man—an Arabian or Persian mercenary, a member of the guard. As swift and silent as a shadow the man had come alone to the upper story with the look on his face of one who expects to meet with his heart's desire. He was so intent on his quest that he had not noticed Menni; had leaped toward a curtained doorway and was peering into the darkened apartment beyond.

Almost completely naked—a polished body, bronzed by the sun, a mop of thick black hair, cut square at his shoulders; a shield gripped by one hand, a heavy spear by the other, a slender, curved sword at his waist.

It was nothing but the briefest of visions, a mere painted shadow cast by the yellow flame of a hanging bronze lamp.

So swift that it was over even before he himself recognized his purpose. Menni had seized a small but exceedingly heavy chair of inlaid ebony, had struck the shadow to the floor. A thud, a stifled gasp, and the governor of the Double Palace was standing there with the mercenary's sword in his hand. Had bone and thigh become liquid lightning he would have felt as he felt now.

There was no weight in him at all, just dynamic force. He cast one quick glance about him, then, without feeling the steps beneath his feet, was in the lower hall.

There he was, face to face with a group of guardsmen—four or five of them. At sight of him their expressions had changed, they had quailed back against the wall.

"Where is your captain?"

They chattered that they didn't know, gave random information.

A storm of cries came from another quarter—outside, some place. Menni leaped for the door as the clamor grew louder, paused there, then himself uttered a low cry as he located the storm-center in the building where the women were quartered. Only a second he tarried. He turned to the mercenaries, still covering in the hall. His words were as quick and keen as electric sparks.

"I'm master here. Guard this house as you value your souls!"

There are times when words convey all of the fierce meaning behind and above them like the claws of an eagle.

Menni had disappeared, his words still vibrant in the minds of the men he had left behind him. An Ethiopian of the guard had entered the hallway. He had a smudge of blood on his cheek. His eyes were aflame. He started for the stairs. He was impaled by a spear before he had gone up two steps.

Nefru's house, like those of her wealthy neighbors, was entirely surrounded by a high wall. Besides the principal residence there were other buildings—granaries, quarters for the men, quarters for the women—the latter the prototype of the zenanas and harems of the East.

Slashing with his deadly keen sword, but doing more effective service still with elbows and his one free hand, Menni had fought his way into the house of the women—a suffocating struggle through clamoring guards and shrieking slaves.

A brief, hideous shambles and he was

recognized. It was no mere triumph of physical strength. It was the triumph of authority, of mind and will.

Flickering yellow light, a dozen prostrate forms, growing stains on the floor, passion and revolt gone out of them in that first fierce explosion, and the survivors were cowed, ready to crawl.

Unfatigued, his gray eyes narrow and scintillant, Menni huddled the remnant out into the garden, with his own hand stripped them of their arms.

From the quarters where the men had been sleeping appeared a furtive, silent band—bargemen, most of them, eager for they knew not what—a wild hope for nameless things, tempered by the chill ghost of sudden death.

They also had recognized Menni. Most of them, that very afternoon, had seen him betrothed to Berenice. Was he not of their house?

"Bind these men—take their arms!"

A dozen of the slaves had leaped to obey while the words were still in his brain.

The bargemen were used to tying knots. Even in their small way they were sailormen. They were possessed of gigantic strength.

As Menni turned once more toward the house of Nefru a fresh confusion of sound smote him through.

Lesser than anything he had been hearing, yet infinitely more terrifying!

His shoulder was adrip with sweat and blood. He swept his hand over it for a heart-stilling second, then dashed forward.

He had heard a few broken words in the voice of Berenice, a rising protest in the voice of Nefru, both answered by gruff accents he recognized as coming from the captain of the guard.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ACROSS DARK WATERS.

It is most likely that Ennana, captain of the company who had been sent on the extraordinary mission that night of

bringing into the presence of the Isis the person of his own superior, Menni, governor of the Double Palace, was better versed in palace politics than most men.

Ennana was a good deal of a politician himself. He was sprung from one of the lesser princely houses of the lower kingdom. He had seen men less favored by birth rise high in the administration of the empire. But, like so many men in whom ambition runs high, he lacked the force of character to realize his dreams.

Hitherto he had always sought to accomplish his ends by stealth and flattery. Did this, even while denouncing himself for it in private and hankering for the boldness which put other men ahead. And, as so often happens, he had gradually accumulated a reserve of desperate resolution which would be sufficient, when the time came for one bold move, at least. The moment that he had received the command for Menni's arrest he was thrilled with the conviction that the time had come.

He was handsome, had cherished his own secret hopes of winning the regard of Netokris on that account. She had had no eyes save for Menni.

Menni in disfavor!

He, Ennana, sent to arrest him!

What possibilities did not lie before him!

He was filled with nervous excitement. At moments he was shot through by qualms of shaking fear; but, on the whole, there was the unbridled joy and hope of himself becoming Menni's successor, not only in the stewardship of the Double Palace, but in the regard of Netokris herself.

There is nothing so absolutely positive as the fact that authority is a gift from the gods. A school-teacher who hasn't received the gift can't exercise it, any more than can a captain of the guard. Not a man who followed Ennana through the dark streets of Memphis that night but felt within the innermost depths of his being that here was his own chance as well.

Ennana for himself! Each for himself!

Scarcely had that first summons been delivered at Nefru's gate than the captain of the guard sensed mutiny and desertion. In vain had he sought to show himself the man of power by striking dead Tano, the gate-keeper, when that old slave returned.

A dozen of the guardsmen had seized the opportunity to spring forward into the garden—a wavering second, then others followed.

Ennana had cried an unheard order, rushed after his own men, found himself alone and in comparative darkness. Trembling, mad, desperate, and this was the opportunity he had waited for!

He was no fool, even while panic scourged him into action.

Better acquainted with the architecture of such places than his men could possibly be—low-born and foreign, all of them—he took a mental survey of the place, guessed where lay the apartments of Nefru and Berenice. Where else would he be so certain to find the man he had come to seek?

To find him immediately, that was the most important thing. He would appeal to Menni as a man of sense and order, would serve him with the warrant, get him away from the house and have him bound. And then—ah, then, what could not he and his men do!

Menni would not be so handsome with a black eye, two or three teeth missing. He himself would see to that.

Quick! Up the back way—the passage that always existed between the cook-house and the main dwelling; that would be the safest road to take.

But Ennana had difficulty in forcing the door, and once within found himself face to face with the old Mimout—a black crone, still powerful, who had belonged to Nefru when they both were children. She blocked the way, was deaf to Ennana's muttered threats and curses, until he had strangled her into submission.

He lost more time in the upper chambers of the house, saw the man he was

after appear on the stairs, then, while he watched, petrified and silent, saw the tragedy that followed.

The women! They were his only hope. Menni would never go away and leave them.

As soon as that human death-bolt had disappeared down the steps Ennana was rushing up in the direction from which Menni had appeared. He came to the roof, found Nefru, the mistress of the house, still standing, her arms up, her voice quavering out the offer of her soul to the gods in exchange for the safety of her children.

"Behold, your wish is fulfilled," cried the captain of the guard.

That spectacle of feminine love and weakness had done more to bring his own courage back than anything else could possibly have done.

Nefru looked at him, recognized him by both his words and his appearance as an officer.

"Who are you?"

"Ennana, the captain. Quick, where's the girl? I have but just now met Menni on the stairs. I give you both my protection!"

In a sudden reaction from her momentary desperation: with, even then, a glimmering hope that that offered sacrifice of hers had already been heard with favor by the gods, Nefru hurried back into the house with all the speed at her command, her thoughts on Berenice.

Ennana followed, a gloating sense of ultimate victory now pumping higher and higher in his heart.

Nefru had come to the end of a curtained corridor, stopped before an open door, turned to the captain of the guard.

"Pause here while I warn her," Nefru said.

But the captain of the guard brushed past her, stood within the room beyond.

There is a quality of the clear Egyptian night that renders things visible. It was this way now. The room was flooded with the blue refulgence of out-of-doors streaming through two uncurtained and unglazed double windows.

On a narrow, linen-covered couch, her fair head supported on a carved wooden "rest," Berenice still slept—a vision of innocent beauty that made even Ennana gasp. A second or two he stood there, gazing with all his eyes, then Nefru clutched him by the arm.

"Out! Out!" she whispered fiercely. "What do you mean? Fool! Should Menni know!"

Ennana turned to her with an insolent and impatient laugh.

Nefru, outraged, but still not comprehending, again protested, softly still. If she expected Berenice to sleep on uninterruptedly, however, the hope was vain. Hideous clamor had broken out in the yard below in the direction of the women's quarters.

Berenice stirred, sat up, an expression of bewilderment and dawning alarm on her face. She saw Nefru seize a strange man by the arm, attempt to thrust him back through the door, while the clamor out of doors grew louder.

Followed in that chamber a turmoil of wild confusion, of sickening effort to shake off this nightmare into which she had awakened from such wonderful dreams of love and peace.

Who can measure the length of any nightmare?

There was struggling confusion in which Berenice felt that she was only dimly conscious of her own wild efforts to aid her aunt; then, afterward, to free herself. An eternity of nightmare! Then—"Nefru! Berenice!"

Ennana had whirled at the sound of that voice. Fear gripped him. All that postponed force of character and unrequited ambition was flaming hot.

No use! His hour was past!

He knew it even as he rushed at Menni—a statue of Nemesis there in the door, recognized it in his last despairing flash of consciousness as the thin, curved blade Menni still carried pierced his side.

Calm, self-possessed, a rock of strength for Nefru and Berenice shud-

dering at his side, Menni stood a few minutes later looking up and down the bank of the sacred lake.

"They have taken their precautions," he murmured.

Nefru's barge, which was generally anchored there, had disappeared.

"It is well," said Nefru. "Let us make our peace with the gods."

Out of the shadows of the bank a skiff appeared, the craft of a humble, nocturnal fisherman.

"Here," cried Menni in a voice that was soft, but still vibrated with the accent of command. "We would cross over."

The fisherman, wondering, obeyed.

A few moments later and they were gliding across the dark waters toward the huge blue ghosts of the pyramids—toward the City of the Dead.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FOUR WHITE GESE.

THE high priest, Baknik, had again sought the seventh chamber of the pyramid of Menkaura, intent on his observations of Orion. More than any other member of his brotherhood, he was absorbed in the contemplation of the stars and planets.

He was better endowed. He had known moments of ecstasy, especially there in the seventh chamber, when his spirit left the weight of his body behind it and soared off free to celestial heights.

Baknik and his kind—never numerous at any period of the world's development, though there have always been a few of them—could study, without other instrument than that of the spirit, the infinitely great or the infinitely small—could cruise at will through space, whether that space lay between molecules or stars.

It was a cubical room, not more than twelve feet square, sides, floor, and roof of massive stone, not more than one joint or seam on any one surface.

A little while before one of these

joints had opened noiselessly to admit the priest, then closed as noiselessly behind him. The cube was hermetically sealed. None but an initiate could have lived in such a place for more than an hour or so at the most.

Baknik, exquisitely clean, as became the members of his cult, spotless both as to body and raiment, had already composed himself to the temporary death which was the only means of setting the spirit completely free—had taken his position on the cruciform stone couch which occupied the center of the chamber.

In a physical sense, darkness and silence were absolute. But a few seconds had elapsed when the breathing of the adept—barely perceptible even from the first—became extinct.

But Baknik was conscious neither of darkness nor of silence. It was as though the mountain of rock about him had dissolved into air. He was free in the calm, luminous atmosphere of the night, looking down upon the wide, blue, artificial sea between Memphis and the Necropolis.

His attention wafted upward to the stars and the interlying gulfs of space. But there he remained poised, some prescience of earthly developments drawing him back as by a silken thread.

He felt no fear, no impatience, no surprise. There was no emotion in him other than a sort of all-wise, all-embracing sympathy. He was in perfect harmony with all that was.

Then there penetrated his consciousness, much as a small, earthly sound might penetrate the vast solitude of the upper night, a thought of his friend Menni. It was true that he had foreseen Menni's approaching death. He thought of it now without emotion. The fact roused no more emotion within him than the contemplation of any fact. It was always beautiful, the truth.

But there was something more than that. Menni was not yet dead. Menni had need of him still.

Though Baknik had looked forward

to this night of contemplation and study, there was no slightest trace of disappointment in him as he deftly re-entered the seventh chamber of the pyramid, again took possession of the quiescent body on the cruciform couch.

Baknik stirred and sat up. There had been no lapse of consciousness. It was merely as though he had slipped on a heavier garment over a lighter one. The seam that had admitted him into the chamber again opened and he passed on out. Six times after that he passed through chambers which he found hermetically closed and which he left hermetically closed behind him.

He came at last to the long, narrow, perfectly straight tunnel near the base of the pyramid that led to the outer platform, slowly made his way along this, aware, by the small and twinkling star he could see in the velvet darkness beyond the tunnel's mouth, that dawn was yet an hour away.

As he emerged into the outer air he was not surprised to see three figures approaching from the direction of the lake, nor was he surprised to recognize these as his friend Menni, and Menni's friends, Nefru and the girl Berenice. He lifted his hand in silent greeting, stood awaiting them.

There were two temples on the platform of the pyramid of Menkaura, instead of the four each which stood on the platforms of the larger but less beautiful neighbors of this one—temples to Isis and Osiris, the male and the female aspects of the same god-principle, of the same Unknowable One.

Berenice and her foster-mother had gone into the temple of Isis. Menni and Baknik into the other.

"You have done well to come," said Baknik with gentle friendship. He was still more or less under the domination of his recent spiritual flight. Nothing that Menni and the women had told him had greatly stirred him. These things were finite, ephemeral, earthly, and of no great consequence. "You have done well to come."

"I hesitated on your account, dear

friend," said Menni; "but our good Nefru insisted. Now, for my part—married in the heart and by the spirit—"

"Why, on my account."

"I didn't want to bring disaster down on you, as I did on them. Is there a greater curse than to make those you love share your suffering?"

"Menni," said Baknik, "I have told you that you are condemned to die, and to such it is permitted me to speak of things otherwise forbidden."

"Say on!"

Menni's voice was steady.

"You speak of bringing down disaster upon me; bringing suffering on those you love. You could not bring disaster upon me. You could not bring suffering on those you love. Each can do these things for himself, but not for others."

"Netokris!"

"Not even Netokris. She can cut your body to pieces, but she can't touch you. She can burn my body on the refuse-heap, out there at the city's purification-plant, but she can't touch me."

"But our mummies—the mummies of our ancestors!"

"A token of respect to the departed double. We say, here dwelt an immortal thing, essence of the unknowable. It is holy ground. Let us preserve it from contamination. But the reality, my friend, is beyond the power of mortal revenge."

"But if I am to die—"

"Why should you marry Berenice? You will unite your soul to hers. A beautiful thing—two souls just wed—a nuptial journey into the ether."

"You can promise these things?"

"Yea, in the name of the gods!"

"The will of the gods be done! When—when—"

"For death be ready even as though you knew the hour."

They had reached the far extremity of the temple where a lofty statue of Osiris reared its dim height in front of them, and there they stood, their arms crossed—right hand clasping the

left shoulder, left hand clasping the right shoulder—while a watchful acolyte, recognizing the high priest if not the governor of the Double Palace, threw fresh incense into the pans of the tripods.

It was a peculiar thing. As often as Menni had looked upon the sculptured face of the god—in the temples; in bold relief along the cliffs which, in places, reared their height on the borders of the Nile; in the new treasure-house of the Double Palace—as often as he had looked on the graven features of the god he had never seen him look quite like that.

The look was no longer blank and indifferent. It was the expression of one who smiles at the dawn of eternity. Would he smile like that when the hour his friend had predicted drew near. He hoped so. He resolved that he would.

And Berenice!

The girl and her foster-mother also must have been experiencing similar meditations. They were calm, serene, almost joyful, as they appeared again. The Egyptian priests always did claim that the worship of the gods was never so potent as when the postulant stood in the shadow of a great misfortune.

Almost dawn!

They stood together—Berenice and Menni—on the pyramid-platform looking into each other's eyes.

"No regret, beloved?"

"No regret!"

Later, when once more struggling in the net of circumstance, they were to recall that supreme declaration just before the priests summoned by Baknik began to intone the wedding-chant.

The song throbbed up, slow and solemn, while Menni and Berenice stood there clasping hands—behind her the kind-faced old Nefru, smiling for all the tears she was trying to keep back and couldn't; behind him Baknik, his head bowed forward somewhat, in his deep, brown eyes a look of ineffable sadness for all his spiritual convictions.

Two young priests had brought, with great solemnity, a covered basket, large and square, and placed it just in front of where the bride and bridegroom stood.

There was no interruption of the chant as Baknik stepped forward and stood for a second or two, hesitant, as though waiting.

There had been an increasing brightness in the air, so gradual that the eyes, accustomed to the darkness, were suddenly surprised to find it day.

Purple, then gold! The sun-god, Osiris, born again, had thrust his crown above the edge of the world.

"And thus will your souls, and mine, my children," said Baknik, leaning over the basket, "feel the kiss of Osiris—east, south, west, or north!"

As he straightened up, four white geese lifted their heads from the basket, then, with a whirl of wings, were beating up into the air. For a while they fluttered there—white and red, more like angels than birds in the level rays of the sun—then sped away into space.

All eyes had been straining to follow the flight. Such is the blessed, childish quality of human nature—to watch a pretty spectacle even when the grim and terrible is near.

There was a sudden hush, a sort of whispered chorus:

"The Isis! The Isis!"

No one had seen her approach. She had come silently as that dark angel which Baknik himself had said was ever lurking at her elbow.

They saw her—both at the same time. Menni and Berenice, as they brought their eyes down from the sky. She was looking at them unsmilingly.

Netokris!

CHAPTER XX.

GUESTS OF HONOR.

SHE had had an evil night—had Netokris. Over in the Double Palace

startled attendants were even then discovering the body of the theretofore all-powerful Kashta.

It seemed strange that so mighty a man could have fallen victim to such a tiny weapon—a mere needle of a bodkin with a jeweled handle.

"The tooth of an asp is small like that," one of the men whispered.

It was a veiled reference to the Isis, wearer of the Diadem of the Serpent. That was all.

Netokris might have been able to conciliate her feelings to Kashta's methods if he had not blundered; but when one frightened guard after another straggled back to the palace with news of what had happened in Nefru's house, Netokris was torn with such shame and rage as even she had never known before.

It was all the more deadly in that she was denied expression of it. She had no tears. No curses were adequate. She had used up all that she had ever known on far lesser occasions than this.

Kashta, enough of a magician to know that this was a peril he could only exorcise by confronting it, sought out the queen—the queen whom he himself had created. He looked at her, and as he looked all strength went out of him.

So subtle and strange is death, despite man's long familiarity with it, that even magicians are often unable to recognize it until it stands there close at hand.

Once more Kashta attempted to say the thing that he had said the other day:

"Oh, no, you won't; you won't kill—"

His tongue clicked even as he said it. He knew that he was saying that which was not true, even as the words came back to him.

A wild, fierce joy had come into the greenish eyes of Netokris. Here was the way that she could express at last all that was burning in her mind and heart.

She had always carried that tiny weapon for herself—death, painless, instantaneous, whenever she might wish it.

She laughed as she thrust the dagger into Kashta's breast.

A bad night!

No more news to be had from the guards who had returned. They had been whipped to ribbons already. Yet, not another word to be had. The messengers she had sent to Nefru's house had come back with nothing more than what she had already learned.

Ennana dead, a score of others dead or dying. Those kindly-treated slaves of Nefru's had evidently been able to keep alive within them, along with those other qualities that kindness and good food nourished, a spirit of fighting independence.

But, even so, she could see the hand of Menni. Ah, gods of darkness, spirits of the infernal regions, what a man!

And he scorned her!

She was glad that she had killed Kashta. She was glad that the blundering fool Ennana was gone. She would see that neither body was given burial.

There was a small apartment not far from the open room where Netokris usually slept, into which no one had ever penetrated except she herself, Kashta, and a certain black attendant—an acolyte of black magic whom Kashta had brought from Ethiopia. Into this room the queen had gone.

Her soul was sick with murder—she could have murdered every human being in the palace and still have found no relief other than that which she had already experienced in slaying Kashta.

But the murder of Kashta had suggested an even greater crime. Kashta was the hierarch of the oldest religion in the world. His temple was the room into which none but he and his attendant and Netokris ever went.

A small room, but lofty, lighted by a green bronze lamp suspended from the ceiling, cerily draped with long

green curtains. Even now Netokris felt a dilation of her heart as she entered, for here was kept the only thing in the world which had ever commanded from her a feeling akin to reverence. Her eyes rested upon it, while that light of savage joy rekindled in them.

She was looking at a small serpent, not more than two feet in length, which, at her entrance, had reared up its body and begun to sway.

For an interval she looked at it, her eyes no less steady, hypnotic, and deadly than those of the serpent itself.

"Speak!"

She hissed the word mockingly.

"Listen. I have just slain Kashta. You spoke to him, gave him your wisdom. Now speak to me, or I shall slay you as well!"

She was deriving a feeling almost of peace from her own words. She was defying this ancient serpent which Kashta, and even she herself, as well as the black magicians throughout the world, had worshiped.

The serpent had spread its hood, was again swaying slightly.

Netokris spat at it. There was no response.

For a while she contemplated this astounding fact, then, from its place behind the curtains, took out an ebony bar which Kashta had used in his magic ceremonies. It was with this—an implement no less sacred than the serpent itself had been—that she beat the reptile to death.

Refreshed, exhilarated—with an exhilaration, however, which she herself recognized as artificial, as that which is created by the use of potent but deadly drugs—Netokris went through the palace and summoned her people to carry her to the pyramid of Menkaura. It was there that Metemsa was entombed.

Her only thought just then, perhaps, was that this was the only place left to her for further sacrilege, should she be in the mood for it.

But, as the royal barge swam across

the waters of the silent, spirit-haunted lake, a feeling of sullen melancholy replaced the recent storm. Like many of her kind, she possessed at times a sort of clairvoyance, and she became increasingly certain that in this present excursion of hers she was guided by the hand of fate.

Was that hand itself to be guided henceforth by the spirit of the murdered Kashta, by the still more potent spirit of the sacred serpent she had killed?

As if in answer to the questioning of her own heart there came to her from the direction of the pyramids a solemn chant.

At first she didn't notice it particularly. There were often nocturnal services over there, especially when death was stalking abroad, as he usually was.

Then, all of a sudden, she was listening with a thumping heart, with open lips, irregular breathing.

The priests were chanting a wedding-hymn.

A wedding-hymn!

She thought of Menni, of the girl Berenice. They had fled together.

Thus far her reasoning took her, then she denied its right to lead her farther. As in a daze—awful, though self-imposed—she dismissed her litter-bearers at a distance from the pyramids, then proceeded toward her destination alone and on foot.

The night was purple—purple with the approach of dawn. Would the purple of her own heart, she wondered, ever know the fresh, sweet gold and scarlet of another sort of dawn?

She had rounded the pyramid and passed behind the temple of Osiris, had walked silently up to where a row of shaven priests were chanting the dawn of a new day for these two spirits just united in marriage eternal, and the dawn of this other day upon which the reborn Osiris was casting his first level rays.

Up into the radiant air, like delivered souls, the white geese fluttered.

Then they saw her—the people there.

As Menni and Berenice moved to prostrate themselves before her, as all the others there had already done, except the tear-blinded old Nefru, who was seeing nought but her children, and Baknik, engaged in his holy office, Netokris raised her hand.

She was still unsmiling. But a feeling of joy and pain so intense as to almost suffocate her was swirling through heart and brain.

There was joy in this fierce torture she herself was undergoing, joy in communicating such torture to others.

"Nay, my doves," she said as softly as she could. "Nay, do not prostrate yourselves. I come as your protector, Isis, but Isis who loves you well." She paused.

"Come, be my guests of honor at the Double Palace."

CHAPTER XXI.

NETOKRIS GETS A WARNING.

MENNI, at least, had taken the queen at her word. He stood very straight, looked at her with level eyes for a second or two.

"The Isis will permit me," he said. Then, turning to Baknik, who, after his first low bow, had also remained erect; "You will care for our mother."

He indicated the kneeling Nefru.

She was still kneeling there as they went away.

Silence hung over the royal barge as it recrossed the lagoon toward the Double Palace. It needed but the wailing of mourners to have made it a funeral-boat.

For, between Berenice and Menni—Berenice on her left hand and Menni on her right—sat Netokris, bright-eyed but absorbed. It was as though the bridal pair were on opposite sides of a granite wall—a wall without a door.

What were the meditations of the queen? Who could tell? Who can

ever tell what the broodings of a woman are when she has everything on earth but the one thing she most desires, the thing that she knows will be denied to her forever?

No reference to the events of the preceding night, neither while the royal barge was crossing the lake nor afterward.

It all happened as in a dream, not for Menni only, but probably for the two women most concerned as well. The great catastrophe, the crushing blow, is always anodyne.

Menni recalled with a smile a certain princely friend of his. This friend had just been ruined—estates confiscated, family sequestered, he himself ordered as a common soldier into a legion departing for a foreign campaign—all as a result of a quarrel with the Pharaoh.

This man had met Menni, smiled upon him, called attention to two playful butterflies circling in the clear air overhead. Five minutes later he had poisoned himself.

Menni recalled the incident as the barge drew up at the landing-stage of the Double Palace. Like that former friend of his, he was submerged in inevitable, unspeakable tragedy, but he noticed that one of the Nubian litter-bearers had a broken sandal-string. He smiled as he thought how the litter-bearer must have regarded that broken string as a tragedy.

Men are always regarding things like that as tragic until real tragedy envelops them.

It was in keeping with the quality of the day that there should befall a certain other nightmarish incident which must here be recorded before proceeding to the narrative of ultimate happenings which now loom big and dark on the horizon.

They were taking breakfast together—the last breakfast, or meal of any kind, they should ever take together on earth, so far as the appearance of things was concerned.

Berenice, Menni, Netokris!

It was in one of the lesser chambers of the palace—large and magnificent though it was; a room, like so many of the others in the Pharaoh palace, with walls on three sides only, a row of lotus-capitaled columns on the other.

An ideal plan for the hot, clear days and nights of Egypt; a man-made grotto, cool and shadowy, looking out upon the limitless prospect of deep blue sky, of dark-green foliage and splashing fountains, of other painted walls and pillars further on; an occasional flash of color as tame birds of gorgeous plumage fluttered about; a group of gardeners passing by—slaves, white, brown, black, naked save for their loin-cloths of striped, coarse linen.

There were three low tables, not much more than ankle-high; cushions on the richly carpeted floor instead of chairs—this being less formal and more intimate. The queen in the center, her two guests seated to the left and the right of her.

There had, as yet, been not a single opportunity for conversation. Even while the Isis was in her own private apartments, a small army of slave-girls had surrounded Menni and his bride, had kept them apart while anointing them with perfumes and decorating them with lotus-buds.

Neither the queen nor Menni nor Berenice wore much else than the necklace of such flowers and their all but transparent skirts of fine linen.

The queen, as hard and radiant—and as silent—as a jewel, smiled upon them. Berenice also smiled, but she was too wonder-struck for happiness; was just beginning to grasp the sombrous portent of all that was going on.

At first she had put it down to the fact that she had married an illustrious man; but intuition had not been slow in hinting at the dread possibilities which filled the mind of her new lord and master. For, though Menni smiled as well, it was none the less the smile of that friend of his who, in the

shadow of death, had called attention to the butterflies.

A smile, so far as he was concerned, was called forth no more by the requirements of politeness than the look of outraged surprise he had seen on the faces of the guilty princes Seti, Saites, Asis, Tentares—regicides, suitors for the hand of the queen—whom they had passed in the outer courtyard of the palace.

Four old harpists, shaven like priests, had taken their position in a corner of the room, had struck up a lilting refrain.

Slave-girls, painted and perfumed, brought food and drink—fruit, syrups, meats, and biscuits, both cold and hot; wines and beers, water from the Nile made clear and sweet by having been strained through almond-paste.

Then, while yet they had scarcely touched their viands, while the harpists were still engaged on their first lilting theme, that nightmarish incident—not nightmarish then, nor inexplicable, as it was later—only solemn and impressive.

Quite suddenly, coming up the steps from the garden, appeared Baknik, the high priest. By right of his high office, as well as of his princely house, he was free to come and go in the palace at will. But that he should thus come unbidden into the presence of the queen-goddess at a moment like this—that was unheard of.

The moment that Menni had recognized his friend he had glanced at the queen, saw a look flash across her glittering eyes that he had never seen there before. She had been taken by surprise. He would have sworn, even, that there was an element of fright in the look.

As for Baknik, he had never appeared more composed, nobler.

"I come not to eat, but to deliver a message to you, O Netokris," he said softly—"a message in the presence of these two."

Netokris looked at him as she might have looked at a magical handwriting on the wall.

"What is your message, O Baknik?"

"This O queen—that whatever you do to these children of ours you do in the shadow of your own death."

From Berenice, a little gasp; from Menni and the queen a moment or two of breathless silence. There was irony in the advice of the *almahs* who had just appeared with their prologue:

Make a good day;
Your tomb is gray—

Then the queen spoke: "All that we ever do is in the shadow of death, O Baknik."

"Not only your death I announce, but the end of the dynasty, O Isis."

The incredible words were as softly spoken as though they had merely foretold a minor campaign against the rebellious tribes of the desert.

Netokris affected a laugh.

"It isn't good form to promenade a mummy at breakfast," she said. "In our set that is usually reserved for more formal occasions—dinners and banquets of state. But since you have said this much, be so kind, good Baknik, as to tell me who will be my successor."

—There were many thoughts revolving in the mind of the queen just then, no doubt—the annihilation of the detested princes who had swarmed the palace ever since the murder of Metemsa, the death of not only Menni and Berenice, but of Baknik himself.

None could speak to her as he had spoken and continue to live. But the very next words of Baknik were the most astounding of all.

"It is I, Baknik, who shall succeed you."

The harpists thrummed on their harps. The row of *almahs* swayed like young rushes in the breeze and sang as softly as the breeze itself. The birds of gorgeous plumage and the fountains added their notes of light and life and color to the courtyard beyond the painted pillars, but neither Netokris nor Menni noticed any of these things.

"It is I, Baknik, who shall succeed you."

This, and then the priest had turned his dark eyes on the two whom he had so recently made one.

"Whatever happens don't be afraid," he said. "Life is not all of life, nor is death all of death."

They were the last words that they ever heard him speak. While they were still under the influence of his amazing appearance there, and of the still more amazing things that he had said, Baknik was leaving by the way he had come.

To the slave-girl attendant who was at her side at that moment the queen gave the languid order:

"Our great friend Baknik is not to leave the palace. Warn the guard."

CHAPTER XXII.

A WARD OF THE ISIS.

NOTHING had changed, so far as outward appearances were concerned. But when were outward appearances ever of more than secondary importance where human hearts were concerned!

The deep, clear-shadowed portico with its painted columns and high frescoed, the bald old harpers in the corner strumming on their curved, ornate instruments, the double file of maidens who sang and danced while other girls came and went with the scarcely touched viands; outside the slumberous, almost deserted garden with the intensely blue sky above; a splotch of empty sunshine there where Baknik had been standing but a few seconds before.

He had come and gone, and that was the only visible change.

But had a crumbling earthquake fallen upon the earth it could scarcely have made a greater difference to the three who pretended to be at breakfast.

To the girl Berenice, already more or less overwhelmed by the stupendous events of the last few hours, Baknik's advent and the things he had said were of the nature of an earthquake sure enough, one that had shaken her world to pieces. A little while ago she had

been moving in a golden dream—just married to the man she loved, guest of "her who lived in the Double Palace," one whom she had never even dared in all her young life to so much as mention by name; and from this dream she had been plunged into lurid, unspeakable nightmare.

Her eyes went darker. Her lips were open. She was breathless. She looked across at Menni.

Menni looked back at her with a tense smile of high excitement masterfully controlled. His own gray eyes were gleaming.

Then both of them looked at the queen. Netokris returned the look with indolent poise, but they both noticed that her hand trembled slightly as she dipped her fingers into the scented water. Suddenly she shrugged her shoulders and smiled.

"Poor fellow!" she exclaimed softly. "I fear that he has been communing overmuch with the gods."

"There is no truth, of course. O Isis, in the things which he said."

Menni's voice was so softly pitched that Berenice herself could scarcely hear what he said. But she felt instinctively that some dreadful peril hung over them both, that he was making some bold play for their self-preservation. She had become the mere spectator, as Menni and the Isis looked into each other's eyes—each knowing much that lay in the other's thought.

"Who knows better than my governor?" she answered him. "I have heard it said that you also can look into the secrets of the gods, at times."

"Yes, at times."

"Now?"

"Even now, to some extent, O Isis."

The queen was looking at him fixedly, smiling slightly, perfectly aware—he knew—of the game he played.

"And what is it my governor sees?"

"The Isis in beautiful form—great and generous, of life everlasting; and in her presence, dazzled by her refulgence, two of her unworthy subjects

upon whom she will never cease to shine!"

"Truly spoken," answered Netokris without change of expression. "Even now it was in my mind to keep you both near to me."

Menni's expression had changed, but he had gone too far to back down. He glanced at Berenice—unable to keep the longing and the tenderness out of it even had he wished—then back at the queen.

"Together?"

The question was involuntary—voiced the fear uppermost in his mind.

"Soon, my impatient bridegroom," Netokris answered. "I fear that you can't be spared for a few days yet from the great work that demands your time and attention just now. In the meantime, rest assured that your Berenice will remain the ward of the Isis."

There was an undertone in the softly spoken words that made Menni's blood run cold. He would have spoken—checked himself as he felt some sort of a blasphemous protest springing to his lips.

It wasn't his fault if he forgot that this was a goddess in whose presence he was. Such an attitude toward her had never been instinctive with him, anyway.

Now, the feeling of reverence which should have been his had disappeared almost completely. Despite his volition to think otherwise, his heart was clamoring the truth that he was in the presence of a wicked and revengful woman.

He wasn't prepared for the thing which followed. No man is ever prepared for some of the things that a woman may do.

Netokris had turned to Berenice, had smiled upon her.

"Come," she whispered softly—"come sit at the side of your lord. Don't be so shy. There is none to notice save the slaves, who are as animals, and I, the Isis."

Berenice flushed at the reference to the slaves. Her own period of bond-

age, sweet as it had been, was still too recent and real to make the remark of Netokris anything else than a veiled insult. Flushing, she hesitated. But she had received an order.

With all the gentle timidity of her virgin heart she rose from where she sat, went over to a place between Menni and the queen.

"Put your arm about her, my lord-governor," said Netokris.

Menni obeyed.

His heart was pounding, but his chin was high. As the delicate form of Berenice wilted against him, as there rose to his face the delicate, natural odor of her glorious hair, he felt as though he could have defied every god and goddess in the universe.

His arm encircled her, strong and unflinching. Anmon only knows what the feel of it must have been to the shrinking, bashful, frightened girl.

"Kiss her," hissed the queen with an odd mingling of agony and exultation in her savage face.

Berenice's body was shaken with a slight tremor. Menni noticed it—that and how she shrank yet a little closer to him.

"Yea, and gladly," he said stoutly.

"Kiss her," Netokris repeated, "then go and leave us. Fear not. She is the ward of Isis!"

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CHAPTER XXIII.

"WHEN OSIRIS MOVES."

PREPARATIONS were going ahead rapidly for the great banquet which Netokris herself had announced to Menni that day she had given him the famous sapphire known as the "Tear of God Ra." Menni himself was in charge of the principal feature of the preparations—the final decoration of the great, underground treasure-palace imagined and begun by the murdered Metemsa. It was here, as the queen suggested, that the banquet was to be held.

But this was only one detail of the

several which seemed destined to make this occasion one of the most notable in the history of the Double Kingdom.

It was to be more than a mere celebration of the queen's ascension to the Double Throne, for it was pretty generally understood that on this day she would select some one to share the throne with her. The possibilities of the situation were of a kind to bring every educated man and woman in the empire to an agony of suspense. Not since old King Menes was killed by a hippopotamus had the land of Egypt faced such a crisis.

First, that palace conspiracy which had resulted in the death of Metemsa; the accession of the queen under the powerful domination of Kashta; the tragic death of Kashta; the widespread feeling in the air that the rich and powerful priests would not long delay in putting forth a candidate of their own for the throne.

Even the hod-carriers knew it—unless Netokris selected a man of power, and soon, her dynasty was doomed.

Who would it be?

Feverish expectancy among the courtiers, jealousies, watchful suspicion day and night, more than one of them conscious of the ever-present angel of sudden death, yet each afraid to flee, secretly hopeful that he was to be the elect of the queen, that it was the others who should feel the touch of the skeleton-hand.

For that the first act of the new consort of the Isis of the Double Throne would be the riddance of his coconspirators was as good as certain.

When Osiris moves!

That was to be the fateful hour when the queen would announce her decision. It had been many a year since such a phenomenon had been resorted to—when some mighty statue of the god had raised a granite arm or bowed his granite head as a signal that some long-awaited hour had come in the destiny of the nation. But the tradition of such things was still strong in the heart of the people of every class.

There were scoffers, to be sure—atheists who claimed that such a thing could not occur except by the trickery of the priests. There were such atheists among the princes themselves; but that did not relieve the approaching decision from many of its tremendous possibilities.

Osiris *would* move—whether by trickery or through the potent interposition of the god himself—every one was sure of that.

And even the most careless and indifferent could see that of late some deep change had come over the spirit of the queen. It had been marked, especially since that night she had ordered the arrest of her governor, Menni. It was almost as though she had taken to heart the reported marriage of Menni to that yellow-haired slave of old Nefru, the girl Berenice.

And yet it couldn't be this. There was Menni back in the palace at his old tasks, apparently higher in favor than ever. And even if he had married Berenice, that could have been a matter of small import to Netokris. There was not a marriage in heaven or on earth that she couldn't dissolve by the merest smile and a word. Yes, Menni was still a man to be reckoned with. His name also, most likely, would be found on the list "when Osiris moved."

As a matter of fact, there was a deeper motive for that change which had certainly appeared in the character of the queen.

There were even moments when she wished that she had the old Kashta again there to give her advice—that she had not slain the sacred serpent. Fear, an entirely new sensation, so far as Netokris was concerned—and, at first, not an entirely unpleasant one—had crept, like the spirit-double of the snake itself, into her heart. She had destroyed her old gods. The new were strangers to her—though she herself was reckoned as one of them and the greatest. She was confronted by things that she couldn't understand, and yet she could turn to no one but herself.

There was that odd, astounding, sacrilegious prophecy which Baknik had delivered. But even that did not disquiet her spirit so much as the apparently simple thing that followed.

She had warned the palace-guard to prevent Baknik from leaving. Not only was the order instantly carried out, so far as human powers were concerned—gates and walls both watched, every one who came and went closely scrutinized, the palace itself painstakingly searched—but his house and the pyramid of Menkaura had also been subjected to unremitting surveillance.

Baknik had not been found. Baknik had disappeared.

Fear, delightful at times, grisly at others, was seldom absent from the queen's thought now. It wasn't fear of death. It was fear of the things she couldn't understand.

There was that affair of Baknik. Equally incomprehensible was the affair of the girl Berenice.

Even while Baknik had been speaking on that morning that she had brought Berenice and Menni to the palace, she had conceived the—to her—ininitely pleasing project of having Berenice whipped to death. She hadn't done so. Up to the present she had been unable to do more than keep the girl aloof—a prisoner, but not otherwise mistreated—along with the other women of the palace.

And that edict which she herself had issued—"when Osiris moved."

At first it had been but a mocking allusion to the great statue of Osiris in the underground treasure-palace—the statue so arranged that it would swing out and permit the waters of the Nile to rush in and submerge the place, thus drowning every one who remained there. The plan was still in her thought, but she was gradually aware that even this had passed beyond her volition.

It was as though the god Horus—he who clipped eternity into pieces and thus invented time—as though Horus himself had selected this hour for the ending of everything that was.

It was under the domination of this deepening mood of fear, of yearning, of baffled will, that Netokris once more sent for the governor of her palace.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NETOKRIS PROPOSES A BARGAIN.

"You look pale," she said softly—"pale and gloomy. That isn't the way that a loyal believer and faithful subject should come into the presence of his immortal queen. Say so and I'll call the musicians and the jugglers, give you some good old wine."

She was laughing at him, though Menni could see that her mood was no gayer than his own. He had prostrated himself, but at a motion of the queen's hand had risen again to his feet. During the past week, with scarcely a word of any kind concerning the fate of Berenice, he had been unable to sleep, and his face showed it.

Netokris half sat, half reclined on a sort of high throne or couch covered with a lion skin. As usual she was but scantily clad, had been at particular pains with her toilet—toes, fingers, lips all stained the same bright pink, her eyes darkened and elongated beyond the line of her straight fine brows. Her short, thick, heavy blue-black hair was cunningly coiled with bands of finely woven gold from which, over her left ear, there hung a cluster of blue-lotus buds. Even at that distance the air was permeated with the delicate, disquieting perfume she used.

Menni looked at her in silence, but his gray eyes rendered the use of words unnecessary. They told the queen everything.

"Poor Menni! Come, sit beside me. You appear so tired—tired with watching and waiting. Come, sit here beside me. Your Berenice won't mind."

"It is true, then—"

"That she lives and is perfectly happy. What greater proof could you have of my—of my—"

She completed the phrase by running

her painted finger-tips through his hair as she reached out and encircled his head with a sinuous arm.

Still Menni didn't dare to trust himself to speech. Berenice safe—that was the big fact—but the arm closed tighter about his head like the coil of a serpent.

"I have shown myself magnanimous on your account," Netokris went on. "Can't you show yourself magnanimous on mine?"

"How?"

"How! By thrilling a little at my touch. Not a prince of Egypt but would give his eyes for this."

"But I—I am grateful," Menni managed to articulate.

"Grateful," Netokris sneered with mocking cruelty—"it isn't gratitude I want."

Another convulsive contraction of her arm about his head. It was too hard for him to speak. He gave up the effort.

"Is it so hard," she asked, "to love me just a little? Listen! When we were together over there that first night in the pyramid I swore to myself that I would never mention it again. I am Netokris—Isis—she who holds the two kingdoms together. But"—her voice sank low—"but I am a woman. I am young. I am beautiful. Why can't you love me, just a little bit?"

"I do, when you're kind. I am loyal, faithful—"

"Oh, not that. I am sick of loyalty, sick of faithfulness. I despise them. Be a traitor, a thief, an idolator, if you will. But love me, thrill to my touch!"

"I would, but—"

"Not but—not would! Aren't you a man? Don't you know what I offer you? Do you attach more importance to the words of that fish-blooded Bak-nik than you do to mine?"

"It is not his words or yours. O Netokris. You ask that which is impossible."

"How, impossible? I'm a woman. You're a man. Forget everything except that—as the gods do when they make us."

"I cannot!"

"Cannot!"

Her stormy nature, like the wind at the center of a hurricane, was whirling from north to south, from a passion of love and self-sacrifice to a passion of hate. Almost without interval the hand that had been caressing him dug its nails into his face.

The movement roused him to action. In a moment he had seized both of her wrists, was holding them tight, had straightened up, was staring at her with unflinching eyes.

"Let go of me," she panted, struggling. "Let go of me, or, by the gods I'll have you torn to pieces, and that slave-wench of yours as well!"

Even as the words poured from her lips she remembered the order she had given that no one should approach under pain of death the place where they were. She would hardly have called out, even if there had been some one there to hear her. Her eyes had narrowed. Her face had gone white.

"I'll kill you both—dogs, jackals!"

"Oh, no, you won't," said Menni, unconsciously quoting the words of the only other man who had ever dared defy her.

His grip had tightened. He had brought Netokris to impotence.

He barely whispered the words: "What if I should kill you, Netokris!"

"Woman-fighter!"

She spat the epithet at him, looking more like a beautiful, enraged serpent than ever.

He merely smiled, as his eyes took on a fresh glint of hard brightness.

"There is nothing to keep me from doing so," he went on. "I have nothing to lose. I know that my hour is almost near. I know that Berenice will die. Life and love are already on the altar. All that is left is my hatred of you."

He had been so engrossed in the spectacle summoned up by things he had spoken that he was unprepared for the next change that swept over the woman in front of him.

A gust of tears!

Netokris, who united the two countries, Queen of the Diadem of the Vulture and the Snake of abiding splendor, the golden Horus in woman's form, soul of the gods—weeping, her slender wrists imprisoned in his brawny fists!

A moment and Menni had slipped to the floor, was kneeling with bowed head.

"Call your guard," he said.

A long interval of silence, then Netokris whispered: "You could have slain me."

"Not when you wept," he answered, looking up, but still on one knee.

He knew that the interview was not ended. He felt safer there in that position—safer with Netokris as a goddess than with Netokris as a woman.

The queen, her mood somewhat calmed by that last, tumultuous outburst—the first time in her life, so far as she could remember, that she had ever shed any tears at all—was evidently thinking hard.

"You could have killed me, but you didn't," she resumed, almost placidly, after an interval. "I could have you and the girl killed now, but I won't. After all, death is such a puny, insignificant thing! I have killed. It never brought me more than momentary satisfaction."

Again she took thought, while Menni waited.

"Listen! It may all be just as that priest of yours has said, that death, even now, is waiting on all of us. But I know more than that. I know that you and I are the arbiters—you and I, even though you have refused until now to share the opportunity I offer you. There is still time.

"My palace is filled with those who want me to place them in Metemsa's place—who suffocate me with their flattery, take away my appetite with their lovesick looks. I'll murder them all—I'll murder them all, and you and myself and Berenice—do you hear?"

"I hear."

"You know that I speak the truth?"

"I know you speak the truth."

"The night of the Tear-Drop of Isis draws near. Already I have dissolved that wedding of yours. Whether the priests want it or not, I am Isis, and that maiden of yours will feed her young body to the crocodiles of Father Nile. You know—warm night, plenty of music, every one drunk—every one, that is, except that white-faced girl who stands on the bank waiting for the water to touch her feet—"

"I know."

"All this—and your death and mine. On the other hand, you and I ruling generous Egypt for many a fat year to come. Even these sleek princes of ours at work to increase our dominions: that pale girl forgiven, forgotten and happy!"

"What do we care for prophecies!"

"I tell you that we are the arbiters. Not we, but you alone. Decide!"

"When?"

"Show me the ring."

Menni held out his hand. On the finger where Netokris had placed it there still gleamed the fathomless blue of the great sapphire—the one tear shed by the God Ra when sin first appeared on earth.

"We hold our banquet on that night—the night of the Tear-Drop of Isis," said Netokris. "If, at that banquet, you give me back this pledge."

CHAPTER XXV.

MENNI WRITES A MESSAGE.

THERE comes a time in the life of every man when he has to decide a thing for himself—when he is confronted by a problem not stated in any text-book, the answer to which can't be given him by any friend, however wise and true. Take a man who is unhappily married, for example. Or, take a man in Menni's case.

Never had he felt so solitary, yet never so much in need of counsel and support, as when he crossed the garden, after that momentous interview,

toward the temple of Ptah under which lay the new treasure-palace.

He felt that he was stared at by the guards, the courtiers, even the slaves, as he walked along.

He had always been more or less the man of mystery, as every man is who has achieved high place in early youth. At first, immediately after the night that Ennana had gone forth to seek him, there had been a slight falling off of his authority. But he had it back again now, stronger than ever.

Not only was he evidently very close to his sovereign. More than that, even, was the feeling he cast about him that here was a man who walked and talked on equal terms with the gods of life and death.

Ennana had gone out against him with the tremendous weapon of a warrant from the Pharaoh. It was Ennana who died.

Now, had Menni been the Pharaoh himself—as, indeed, some day soon he might be, if there was anything in palace-gossip—he could not have been hedged about by more respect.

This very aloofness of those with whom he might have talked in former times increased Menni's feeling of solitude.

No one to give him advice; no maxim—even in the writings of the godlike Hermes—to enlighten him.

He passed on down the long corridors and lamp-lighted steps to the underground treasure-palace. Even the gilders and painters had completed their work. The vast hall was aglimmer with light and color as a hundred other artificers mounted and tested copper flambeaus and swinging lamps.

Against each wall, more striking than ever in their chaste nudity contrasted with the richly decorated background, stood the mammoth statues of Isis and Osiris. One of them could move—would move, unless Menni did as the queen wished him to—and let the torrent of the Nile rush in.

Wholesale death if he clung to Berenice! And this the instrument of it.

No wonder the place made him feel sick.

He waved away the overseers who had hastened forward at sight of him, and once more made his way up to the open air, resolved to make one more effort to find Berenice and escape with her.

Ever since he had come to live in the palace he had insisted on the utmost simplicity, in spite of his high station. He had nothing in him of the sybarite.

Apart from the slaves usually attached to his person, he had only one servant to whom he had ever accorded the familiarity of his full confidence—an old man he had owned since boyhood, a Macedonian named Naktmout. Perhaps it wouldn't be such a bad idea to seek even Naktmout's advice. The man was old. And he was enough of an imbecile—so Menni told himself—to be oracular.

Thought of him gave something of an impulse to the governor's thought-heavy heels. He reached his apartments in the southwestern corner of the Double Palace—a series of rooms opening on a small courtyard sacred to himself—searched them through, called.

Naktmout was not there.

Menni made inquiries. All that he could learn was that the old slave had been summoned away an hour or so before by a messenger from the Pharaoh and had not appeared again. The thing increased his anger. It was so petty—to increase his isolation by robbing him of an old and faithful slave.

For a while he walked about the courtyard wrapped in sullen brooding. He thought of what Baknik had prophesied—that he and Berenice would both meet their end in the waters of the Nile, that Netokris herself was soon to die; recalled what Netokris had said about certain men being arbiters of their destinies despite all prophecies, despite even the edicts of fate.

This train of thought once more set

the blood to tingling through his veins. That very morning he had used force upon Netokris. He still lived.

One more try!

He went into his apartments and took from its place among the other insignia of his rank a short and heavy scourge—an ornate cat-o'-nine-tails, emblem of the royal power vested in him. Several times there had come to him the fantastic dream of a palace-revolution. It had all seemed very remote. Now he was going to try to carry it out.

In the long and stablelike barracks that occupied one entire side of the palace enclosure, there was a company of Macedonians—captives, for they had been taken in battle; yet not precisely slaves, for they had been put on the same footing as the other mercenaries. The captain of this company was himself a Macedonian—taller than most Egyptians, lean, blue-eyed, light-haired.

It was the heat of the day, and most of those officers and men who were not on duty were asleep. But it was different with the Macedonian company, the majority of whom were busy, under a striped awning mounted in front of their quarters, either at games or in polishing and sharpening their simple weapons.

There was swift silence, not so much of consternation as of friendly admiration, when the governor appeared. The Macedonians clung with pride to the tradition that the governor himself was of their stock.

"Your captain, Kalthos?" asked Menni softly.

A dozen men had sprung up to do his bidding, and in a moment Kalthos himself appeared, his peculiarly shaped bronze helmet in place and his striped loin-cloth as orderly as though he had been expecting the distinguished visitor. Nor did he show any surprise or nervousness in his grave and respectful salute. He was every inch the soldier, was Kalthos—perhaps himself a progenitor of the Ptolemies.

"Kalthos, I have things of importance to say to you."

"If my lord will accept a soldier's hospitality."

The captain of the Macedonian company had at his disposal a small, white room, monastic in its simplicity and cleanliness. A stool, a wooden couch, a table on which were various pieces of papyrus, brushes, and paints.

"You write?" cried Menni in surprise.

"But a few simple signs, as yet," the soldier answered modestly.

"Continue," said Menni, with an accent of enthusiasm, then fell to musing. "I also write somewhat," he went on after an interval. "Let me show you."

As the governor of the Double Palace seated himself at the table and took up the brushes Kalthos stood at attention, his eyes fixed on the wall in front of him. It was not for him to watch the artistic struggles of his superior until commanded to do so.

Menni wrote very large—that is, he drew his hieroglyphics very large. Had he not done so there would have been difficulty, perhaps, in distinguishing between the falcon and the owl, the crook and the scourge, the water-line and the serpent.

Finally, after an interval during which the unflinching eyes of the soldier had followed the shadow of the sun a full three-fingers' breadth across the wall, Menni turned and held up the still moist papyrus, the gravity of his face softened somewhat with humor and pride.

"How's that?"

"Written like a priest," Kalthos replied with sincerity, as his blue eyes lit up.

"And to a priest," the governor answered. "Can you read it?"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THROUGH DARK HALLS.

For an interval Kalthos looked at the pictured page his chief was holding

up, and he forgot enough of his military spirit to flush a little and smile.

"It is beautifully written," he commented again; "but, you see, I'm an ignorant brute; nothing but a soldier." Then, with a gleam of delighted recognition: "It's to the Pharaoh."

"Yes, but to which one?"

The question was put in a whisper that brought a thrill into the captain's voice, as he answered softly:

"I recognize not the seal."

"Of Baknik, the high priest," said Menni. "Listen while I read:

"To Baknik, Pharaoh, Horus, and Osiris, from his friend Menni, who is about to die, this present is borne by Kalthos, Macedonian, a true man, commander of all the troops of the Double Kingdom."

Kalthos was trembling slightly, but he had become the soldier again. His eyes had left the papyrus, were once again fixed on the wall in front of him. But it required no physiognomist to see that he was listening with all his ears.

"You have heard what I have written," said Menni softly but steadily. "I shan't discuss it with you. You are to take this thing and keep it by you. When the things happen that are likely to happen, it will be your commission to a great career. I have written it because I am about to command you and your men to dangerous work."

Night had fallen over the Double Palace—a night of purple velvet studded with stars that flamed as large and bright as the lamps and torches of the palace itself—when Prince Tentares, honorary commander of the royal barge, made his way toward the landing-stage. It was a highly coveted post held each succeeding week by a different prince of the blood.

Tentares, fat, already the none too worthy husband of half a dozen wives, was, nevertheless, a suitor also for the hand of the widowed queen.

He was mellow with wine, speculated longingly on the prospect of her majesty crossing the lake that night.

Ah, by Typhon! if he only had some sort of magic crowbar to make Osiris move and indicate himself.

He had entered a rose-lined path leading over the embankment—but recently strengthened in view of the approaching period of the annual flood—had started to hum a little tune, when his head was suddenly enveloped in a stout linen sheet.

Two minutes later, while he was still struggling for comprehension, he found himself bound and gagged and lying in darkness on a bed of mud amid villainous odors.

Two shadowy forms, as naked, silent, and lithe as wild animals, slipped along the bank from where they had left the outraged prince, and in a moment or two were again in the vicinity of the rose-lined path.

"All well," they whispered in the Macedonian dialect to their captain, Kalthos.

Kalthos merely answered by a gesture, cast a quick glance at the stars.

"Well-timed," he meditated.

The ease with which this first step had been accomplished gave him melancholy encouragement. But it would be another matter to fall upon the retinue of the Isis, to secure the person of the queen herself, even though the fight be limited to the decks of the royal barge. He was no coward, but he hoped that it would not be necessary, that the queen would remain in the palace that night, that it would be Menni himself who appeared in company with the one they were sworn to carry off to safety.

The night wore on. Slowly, majestically the great constellations swung along their appointed arcs.

Peace and calm!

There came no sounds that one might not have heard on any night—the tremendous chorus of frogs and insects with an occasional note of grosser sound as a fish jumped and fell with a splash in the smoothly flowing waters, or somewhere, far away, a sacred crocodile bellowed defiance to a rival; from

the palace and the palace gardens an intermittent lilt of faint music and far laughter, an occasional cry from a princely roisterer or a beaten slave.

As soon as it was dark Menni, armed with a dagger, but placing more dependence still in his official scourge and his desperate resolution, had quickly crossed the expanse of the palace toward the quarter where he knew that Berenice was being held.

He was prepared for anything. It would either be flight or, once again, a palace revolution—the deposed queen held captive on her barge, he himself the military dictator until the new Pharaoh was seated on the Double Throne.

His destination lay beyond the building set apart as the royal residence—this a small palace in itself, an armed camp at all times, occupying almost a fourth of the walled royal city.

He was in no mood for roundabout methods.

He entered the peristyle of the palace of the queen, was confronted by Prince Saïtes, honorary commander of the bodyguard.

"Your pleasure, my lord?" asked the prince.

Saïtes was a sallow-faced son of the Lower Kingdom—slightly concaved face, melancholy brown eyes full of suspicion and deceit. He had never loved the governor, any more than the governor had ever loved him. Their very natures were inimical.

For several seconds Menni regarded him with piercing eyes and a contemptuous smile. Then he leaned forward.

"Tell me," he whispered, "first what you did with the dagger you used on Metemsa, regicide!"

The prince's face became a trifle more sallow. The blight of fear came into his melancholy eyes.

"I may pass this way again," said Menni meaningly, and was on his way.

He passed through dusky halls and corridors. It made him tremble a little, despite the desperate courage of his

mood, to think how close he was to the person of the queen.

He passed perhaps a hundred men and women—underlings, for the most part; or, at least, those who, while high in rank, lacked the courage or the authority to stop or question him.

He neither tarried nor looked back—showing, perhaps, that however intent a man may be on his purpose, however strong his will, he is still held and guided by the reins of Fate.

He had crossed a wide courtyard perfumed and shadowy with bower after bower of rare, imported flowers—roses from Persia, orchids and flowering palms from the forests beyond the cataracts—and had come to the hall of the eunuchs, presided over by the chamberlain Kovo, a powerful man both as to physique and cunning, whom Kashta had brought from Meroe.

Like so many others whom Kashta had brought with him from the south and placed in power, Kovo also was accredited with magical powers—a reputation not altogether without foundation, perhaps.

He also had blocked Menni's progress with a polite question. Menni was tall, but Kovo was taller. A full seven feet he stood, though as thin as he was black. They made a peculiar contrast standing there—Menni so stalwart and fair, Kovo so grotesquely tall, thin, and black, a burned pine of a man.

"I come to seek the Lady Berenice," said Menni boldly. "Fear nothing from her who crushed the head of your sacred serpent."

Kovo's eyes were as small, as black and as inscrutable as those of a raccoon. For a space he gazed back into the gray eyes of the governor of the palace, as though not comprehending.

"Nothing to fear from her who had crushed the head of the sacred serpent!"

It was incredible, too hideous!

Still, he was thinking rapidly. It is true that he had been assailed by weird, unspeakable misgivings ever since the

murder of Kashta. That it had been murder, and not suicide, he was convinced. Had so great a magician as Kashta wished to die he would have accomplished it by merely willing himself to die, not by the crude method of stabbing himself with a poisoned dagger.

"The lady Berenice!" he exclaimed. "She is not here, my lord—at least, not under that name."

"I'll search."

"Yea, search, my lord."

Kovo summoned two of his attendants, spoke to them rapidly in the language of Ethiopia. They salaamed deeply to the governor, started ahead of him toward the depths of the hall.

Scarcely had Menni's back been turned than Kovo had disappeared—was fleeing like a black, disarticulate shadow across the flowering courtyard toward the apartments of the queen.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BEHIND THE VEIL.

ALREADY apprised by one of her ladies-in-waiting that the governor had passed that way, Netokris was not surprised to receive a visit from her chief chamberlain, to hear what he had to tell.

If she had not been so absorbed in her own thought she would have noticed perhaps the peculiar expression in those black and scintillant eyes, which never left her while Kovo was speaking to her.

Was it possible, he wondered, that this woman in front of him had actually slain the sacred serpent? Wicked, passionate, indifferent to everything but her own desires—so he read her beautiful face—she would be capable of such a thing. He would have to make sure. For was she not to some extent the heiress of Kashta to the sacred hierarchy?

"There is no danger that he discover the girl?"

"None whatsoever, O Isis!"

"Are you sure of your men?"

"Absolutely sure. Even now I spoke to them in the language of Meroe. The secret chamber where the Lady Berenice now lies does not exist save to my vile knowledge and your divine intelligence, O goddess of the Double Tiara!"

Netokris was thinking—bright-eyed, preoccupied. Suddenly she let out a little exclamation of joy.

"Go seek the governor quickly," she said, in low, exultant tones; "tell him that you have discovered her whom he seeks; that she stands under the fig-tree by the second fountain in the courtyard."

Kovo, who had remained kneeling since the interview began, was about to bring his forehead again to the floor as a token that he understood.

"Stay!" the queen cried almost joyfully. "Stay—there is something else!"

In the mean time Menni had been making the most of his opportunity, driven at once by growing desperation and growing desire—now that the object of his quest seemed to be so close at hand.

He had passed through a series of heavy triple curtains at the end of the hall, found himself in a still larger apartment beyond—twilit and slumberous, air heavily perfumed, a dim impression of recumbent forms; from a far corner a greater radiance, a soft babble of voices and tinkling music.

Menni paused, half suffocated with emotion. Thus far his hardihood had brought him probably farther than any other man had penetrated in the history of Egypt—unless he were invader or poltroon. But it was too late for hesitation. He brushed his two guides aside, and strode boldly forward.

A surge of half-suppressed giggles and explanations, a wave of fright, feigned or real; the crash of a harp overturned on the stone floor.

Women plain and beautiful, old and

young—the majority of them beautiful and young—at least, so they appeared to the panicky eyes of the young governor.

But no Berenice!

Hold—there was a Berenice! Some one had pointed to a cowering, shadowy form on a low divan in a corner of the room.

With legs that trembled under him, Menni hastened over for a closer look. Liquid-brown eyes that looked up at him through the semidarkness like pools of yearning. But this was not the Berenice he sought.

He had mounted to the upper floor where the sleeping apartments were; was passing from one to the other with tortured expectancy yet ever-declining hope, when a young slave-girl—her eyes brilliant under her tattooed forehead, her tattooed breasts heaving with the breathless haste she had made—caught up with him.

"My lord! My lord! She whom you seek is waiting for you now—just there, outside in the courtyard, under the fig-tree by the side of the second fountain."

"Are you certain?"

It required but a single glance into that inflamed face, however, to tell Menni that the girl was certain. She was aquiver with the excitement and the joy of it. To speed a lover to the arms of his beloved has always been a joy to women of whatever age and of whatever caste.

Berenice—the Berenice whom Menni sought—had been awakened from a troubled dream by the chamberlain, Kovo. He had been her only link with the outside world since her wedding-day. It had been a period of nightmare here in this dungeonlike room, relieved only by her persistent faith that sooner or later her husband-hero would seek her out, resume the glittering romance that had ended while still but scarcely begun.

She was still convinced to some extent that there had been a mistake; that the great and good Netokris had

been misled; that it was but a question of time when the mistake would be cleared up.

"You are to come with me," said Kovo.

"Where? Menni — will he be there?"

"You are to see him," the chamberlain replied.

There was something so terribly grim in his fashion of saying it that Berenice clasped a hand to her heart.

"He is not dead?"

"No, he is not dead. But you are not to make a sound."

They were of a different race. Kovo had been reared in a hard and terrible school. Ordinarily, he was as indifferent to the spectacle of human suffering as most people would be to the tortured rock under the chisel of the mason. But there was something in the spectacle of this white-faced girl that touched even his atrophied heart.

"If you make a sound," he warned in all kindness, "I am to kill you."

In silence, quivering with expectancy, her hopes battling her fears, Berenice had followed her gaunt and feeble guide to an open window overlooking a courtyard. Not far away was a fountain, at the side of which stood a low, wide-spreading fig-tree.

In the shadow of this tree—yet perfectly distinct in the blue translucence of the night—she saw a veiled and graceful form. A young woman evidently. She must have been beautiful.

There came a sound of hurrying footsteps, a low cry which was vibrant with passionate devotion.

It was Menni.

As through a veil—a black veil that strangled her—Berenice saw Menni leap forward and seize the stranger in his arms.

on to his appointed hour, Menni had given up thought of further revolt. He was not discouraged, not yet even greatly downcast.

After a first outburst of bitterness and rage at the discovery of the trick that the queen had played upon him, he had attained a feeling of dispassionate calm that he felt would never again be shaken either by grief or by joy.

This feeling was largely due, no doubt, to the fact that his friend, the mystical and highly developed Baknik, had taken to visiting him in his dreams. In these dreams they had talked together—Baknik had described and Menni had recognized the inevitable.

In the waters of the Nile he and Berenice were to die together; but over and over again the high priest of the Pyramid of Menkaura had repeated that this would not be the end of things; that death never was.

That Berenice had been set apart as the "bride of the Nile" Menni also knew. In this way he had come to look upon "The Night of the Tear-Drop of Isis"—the first night of the season of Sha, when the inundation began—as the date upon which he and his virgin bride should begin their journey into the unknown.

Still, four nights away. Still, four days and nights of life.

Some whim of Netokris had caused her to advance the date of her projected banquet in the underground treasure-house—perhaps with an idea of herself being free to witness the death of her earthly rival in case Menni should persist in his purpose to flaunt her to the end.

Even now, as he recalled the scene under the fig-tree, his pulse quickened; there was a contraction about his throat. He could have laughed or cursed with equal ease.

"No wonder," he reflected, "that the queen was already known among the mercenaries and other non-believers in the empire by the name of

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE NIGHT OF NIGHTS.

BOUND tighter than ever by the invisible chains that were dragging him

that legendary courtesan, Rhodopis. As such, may she go down to posterity!"

He was arraying himself for the banquet. He had had his daily bath. The barber had just left him freshly shaven. He had even had the barber shave his head after the fashion of the priests.

A good thing, he meditated, for he was soon to appear in the presence of the gods, anyway.

Over his shaven crown he had fitted a massive wig, the tightly curled hair of which descended to his shoulders.

A gold collar—almost a cape of finely linked gold beads and pendants—rested comfortably on his bare shoulders. His loin-cloth, skirt, and tunic were of the finest linen to be procured in the empire.

As he looked at himself in the square mirror of polished alloy, he felt a pang of melancholy regret that Berenice could not see him now.

Then, summoning the litter which he rarely used, he ordered the slaves to carry him to the temple of Ptah, under which lay the vast banquet-hall.

Brief as the distance was, the gold of sunset which still lingered in the air had "run off into the darkness" by the time that the slaves had completed their leisurely course.

For a space of a hundred yards or so round the temple of Ptah an extra force of palace guards were on duty to keep back the uninvited and curious. There were many such, for fame of the affair had spread up and down the Double Kingdom.

Memphis was filling fast, anyway, for the great festival which always marked the beginning of the annual flood. And every one in the city that night who could secure admission to the Double Palace had done so—merchants, landed proprietors, small princes, an extraordinarily large number of priests.

It was almost as though that long-predicted revolution—predicted in whispers for almost a century now—

when the priests were to place one of their own number on the double throne was about to be put through.

A thousand flaring torches, about which scarabs and moths persisted in singeing their sacred wings.

The shifting, soft-spoken multitude of the well-dressed and the well-to-do

Whispered remarks, not always flattery, concerning those who were admitted to the charmed circle drawn by the silent, grim, and foreign-looking guards.

There was a ripple of merriment when Prince Tentares appeared in his litter—so fat, so oiled and perspiring, that the paint about his eyes was already beginning to run. Furthermore, the gossips had been at work; and even those who had not previously heard the story of how, a few nights before, he had been waylaid within the palace itself, trussed up like a goose and tossed into the mire, were hearing it now.

There was a silence that spelled dislike when the melancholy Saites was borne in. There were ugly rumors concerning him which even the gossips did not care to repeat except "from mouth to ear"—that he had been the leader of the palace cabal which had put an end to the days of the young Metemsa.

The princes Seti, Amasis, Aï followed.

The public let not one of them pass without close scrutiny; for was not one of these to be selected—that very night, most likely—to occupy the other half of the double throne?

A whisper of greater curiosity still ran about as Menni appeared; he was so cool, so indifferent, and one of the last, despite the fact that he was not, like the others, one of the hereditary monarchs of the empire.

Surely, a man of mystery as well as of power; as any one could tell by looking into that calm, dignified, sorrowful, yet proud face of his.

Menni's fame had likewise spread up and down the Nile from Delta to Cataract, not only as the builder of the sub-

terranean palace—as the man who had held back the waters of the Nile by pressure of the air—but also as the favorite of the Isis on earth.

The whisper of commendation had become almost a cheer—a sort of wordless surge of envy, admiration, goodwill.

Menni had paid no attention, as became a man in his position; had looked neither to the right nor the left; ~~had~~ stepped from his litter and entered the painted peristyle of the temple of Ptah.

He stood there hesitant for a moment, immersed in sudden recollection of the last time that he had gone into such a temple to worship.

It was the day of his wedding to Berenice—over there under the pale-blue shadow of the Pyramid of Menkaure at dawn.

What changes since then!

A quick glance round. No one, except the slaves who had brought him here, was close enough to follow his actions. No matter if any one did, anyway.

A little later he was standing in the depth of the temple with his eyes on the massive, graven face of the world-maker.

This was the night of nights when he should decide not only his own fate, but the fate of the girl he loved, of all the other men of power and riches and fame who were even then assembling in the great banquet-hall far below the place where he then was standing.

Should he waver? Could he waver? He looked up into the face of the god for an answer.

As on that other occasion, the graven figure seemed to have taken on a look of kindness and comprehension. Yet, it was still the face of a god—of one who looks with patience into the uttermost depths of eternity and finds that all is good.

For a moment Menni let his eyes fall to his extended hand, upon which glimmered the sapphire which Netokris had given him. He looked at it as

though reading therein the grief of the father of all gods when sin first appeared on earth.

Then Menni again lifted his eyes to the face of old Ptah. It seemed to him that this time he and the god had a bond of sympathy between them which had never existed before.

The governor of the Double Palace smiled.

CHAPTER XXIX.

“DRINK TO RAPTURE.”

It was more gorgeous than it had ever appeared before, that strangest banquet-hall ever designed by man; for, after the artificers had completed the lighting arrangements, drapers, furniture-makers, and florists had all vied with each other in making the place complete.

The throne-dais occupied one end of the enormous room—a voluptuous conception of yellow, black, and green, lion skins, giraffe and zebra skins, a section of orchid-grown jungle to left and right, a soaring canopy of rich-green cloth—and in the center of this a golden throne with a golden table in front of it.

It was here that Netokris was to sit.

There was an individual table and an individual chair for each of the guests—some of hemlock and gold, others of ivory and ebony.

The entire floor of the hall was richly carpeted. In addition to this, under each chair and table the skins of other jungle beasts were spread.

Up in front of the dais there was even the carefully tanned hide of a gigantic elephant, and it was on this that much of the dancing, jugglery, and tumbling would take place; perhaps even a duel or two, for Netokris was notoriously fond of bloodshed—and, as some of the attendants themselves remarked, the elephant-skin could be rapidly washed in case of accident.

Along each side of the hall the cun-

ning florists had reared fragrant bowers of foliage and blossoms, behind which the servants could come and go without being too much in evidence.

Two groups of musicians—one of men and the other of women, forty or fifty of each—were posted to left and to right at the end of the room where the dais was. It was curious to remark the difference when one group left off and the other began. A stronger cadence, and a greater exactitude and more power from the flutes and harps when the men were playing; a lighter touch, but with a more emotional and exciting swirl of sound when the women played.

At stated intervals—in response to some signal of their own, no doubt—there would be a moment of sharp silence; then men and women would both be playing an accompaniment to a hidden chorus of singing *almahs*.

There was no waiting for the festivities to begin.

Each guest, immediately upon his arrival, was greeted as though the banquet were all his own. Fresh lotus-blossoms were hung about his neck; he was led to the place previously assigned to him, while the dancing-girls, most famous throughout the empire for their grace and beauty surrounded him, entertained him, while he made his wishes known.

Comfortably seated before his table—previously assigned to him in strict accordance to his rank—a murmured request, and, while he was still looking about him with wonder, a crystal goblet was before him filled with whatever he most loved to drink—famous beers, rare wines.

"Drink to rapture!"

It became a rising chorus as each succeeding guest arrived; for already it was apparent that there would be those present that night who would be more interested in their crystal goblets than they would be in the painted plates.

The tables were filling fast when Menni arrived. His own place was

well forward; but before advancing into the hall he stood long where he was, at the foot of the stairs down which he had come, gazing on all he saw with barely concealed emotion.

The dais of the Isis—so different from the Isis represented in the granite on the four sides of the chamber—so lofty, chaste, and cold.

And there were the four colossal effigies of Osiris, one of which could swing from its place and let into this place the anodyne waters of Father Nile.

Would the queen fulfil her threat—use this very night to slay those who had slain Metemsa—unless he—

Menni gazed down once more at the sapphire ring.

She would be capable of it.

And all these slaves—the singers, the dancers, the musicians, the athletes, the cup-bearers! Would she be ready to sacrifice all these as well?

She would be capable of it.

His head reeled as he thought how that terrible decision rested, after all, with him. His to decide. A simple denial of the dictates of his heart, a negation of a simple matter of principle, and all these lives removed at once from jeopardy.

He had a vision of himself seated up there on the double throne, Netokris at his side. A little unhappiness for himself and Berenice—then forgetfulness!

The thought brought a stain to his cheek. His roving gaze had once more found the placid features of the Osiris. His imagination had again brought to his mental vision the clear, pure face of Berenice. He was hearing the things that Baknik had told him, and something else.

It was something that he had come across in the writings of Hermes while seeking a key to his personal problems. He had found the key without knowing it, and it was this that pulsed through his brain:

"Do that which is right without regard to consequences!"

With a firm step, a smile on his face, he started toward his place, praised and heralded by a group of lightly dressed girls.

"Oh, see Prince Menni, the builder of great works!"

"Hail Menni, as learned as he is beautiful!"

"His eyes are as beautiful as heaven!"

There was too much noise and confusion of movement; too much cadenced music, flaming lights, billowing perfumes; too much wine to make his entrance a subject of more than passing notice.

Yet there was something in Menni's face that caused Prince Tentares to lean over toward Prince Saïtes and crack his first tipsy jest of the evening:

"They've brought in the mummy early to-night!"

Even the melancholy Saïtes relaxed enough to permit a sour and wicked smile to wreath his face.

Menni had come to his place, had settled into his gold-and-henlock chair, allowed those about him to spray him with perfume, had mentioned the wine of Samothrace.

"Drink to rapture!"

He had scarcely touched the wine to his lips when he was, as he thought, victim of a strange illusion.

Had the blaze of brilliant colors, the magnificence of his surroundings, the music, the perfume, he wondered, already mounted to his head? It couldn't be the wine. He had scarcely touched it, and, at worst, it was only slightly alcoholic. That was why he had ordered it in the first place.

It was no illusion—a mistake, perhaps, but not the chimera of overstrained nerves. He had heard it again.

It came to him, out of the great chorus of sounds about him, like the barest whisper—the whisper of a departed spirit, he reflected, that comes to one still engrossed in the turmoil of this earth.

He strained his ears, quivering with suppressed excitement.

It was her voice—the voice of Berenice—that came to him in the singing of the *almahs*.

CHAPTER XXX.

BERENICE!

EVERY chair and table occupied, the festival spirit filling the vast place like some special atmosphere of intoxication, the music drowned at times by bursts of laughter and loud huzzahs as clowns, tumblers, dancers succeeded each other on the elephant-skin, and other dancers, signers, cup-bearers, slaves bearing food, made their rounds of the tables.

No Netokris yet.

The goddess-queen would only appear when it was certain that her guests had eaten all they would. Men could still drink, in the overwhelming presence, but they were not supposed to be able to eat under such circumstances—not at a public function like this.

"Drink to rapture!"

There were many who were taking the advice—those, for the most part, who had long ago forever given up hope of being looked upon with favor by any woman, least of all the widowed queen.

But Menni had turned down his crystal tumbler, was striving with all the power of his brain and heart to once more filter out of the churning ocean of sound about him that one beloved voice.

Then, there it was, just back of him. She had called him by name.

With the instant-quick instinct of a man who has lived most of his life in the perilous school of the palace, he did not give an outward sign of his plunging heart; only turned slowly, saw her, made a quick sign that she seat herself beside him on the tiger-skin at his feet.

"Berenice, beloved! Sh-h-h! Steady.

The father of gods bless your eyes! I heard your voice!"

"My lord, beloved, I am here!"

"I have sought so for you!"

"Yea, I saw you the other night in the garden."

"She deceived me, the Rhodopis!"

"And almost killed me."

"How came you here?"

"Through him who is our friend—the Chamberlain Kovo."

"Him! I thought that it was he who played us the enemy the other night."

"No. Listen! I knew that my eyes must have deceived me when I saw—when I saw—ah! But Kovo came the next day and told me all that had taken place. Beloved, how brave you were!"

Already Menni's mind was busy with the practical features of the case. How had it come that a man like Kovo should befriend so feeble a creature as Berenice? he asked.

"He has learned something about Netokris—hints at terrible things. Oh, dear one, I fear—almost fear that Kovo intends to slay the holy one, the Isis on earth!"

"Learned something!"

Menni recalled the thing that he himself had said to the chamberlain. To as devoted a servant-worshiper as he knew Kovo to be the crime of Netokris would have been sufficient to move him to murder had she been the real Isis instead of a human symbol.

"That we—that I was in disfavor seemed to be enough. He asked me what my dearest wish would be, and, when I told him, made ready to have me here—replaced me in my prison by the poor maid whom I replace here."

There was too much going on throughout the hall for the advent of Berenice at his side to have been noticed. There were other dancing-girls and slaves seated about the carpeted and fur-covered floor. But was it possible that he was spied upon?

Menni had dropped a hand to the dear head at his knee; had plucked a lotus-blossom from it and brought it

to his lips. And just then some subtle sense told him that he was being looked at.

With a very slight, whispering tremor of panic there came to him the recollection of that other time he had felt like that, here in this very room, when, almost against his will, he had made his way into the dark chamber overhead and had found the queen there awaiting him.

Was that the cause of his tremor? Was she there once more looking down at him?

He raised his eyes. He knew where the opening in the ceiling was, but the blaze of near light blinded him and prevented him from seeing it. At any rate, he smiled. Then, in a sudden passion of hate for the creature who was seeking to ruin him, bent and kissed the girl at his side—his wife—on eyes and lips.

And now, to flee!

"Berenice, are you brave?"

"Unto death, with you!"

"Listen! Death, indeed, besets us here! We'll get away together, you and I, out of this cursed place."

"Oh, to live with you, to—"

"There may be a fight. I am armed."

"And I—Kovo gave me a dagger."

"Now, when I say—when I say—"

Again there had crept through every fiber of his being that queer, freezing hint of dread. Not even Netokris could make him feel like that.

He cast his eyes about him, saw something slightly different, at first did not recognize the truth. Then he knew.

The portals between the statues on three sides of the room, those through which the guests had entered on arriving, were closed. The great monoliths had slid down into place. Out of that infernal hall there remained but one way open. And that—that was by way of the throne.

The situation was not without its grim poetry. It was like Netokris to have imagined a deadly symbolism

like that. For him and all the others there—princes, musicians, dancing-girls, clowns, gymnasts—there was only one way out, and that was by way of the throne.

He stooped again and kissed Berenice.

"Now?" she whispered softly, unafraid.

"No, not yet, dear heart," he answered her.

Should he tell her the truth? Should he delay yet a little while?

As he looked about him it seemed impossible that this was not all some fantastic dream—that this revelry, ribaldry, flashing colors, the twisting of graceful forms, the broken gusts of hauntingly sensuous music, were not the phantasmagoria of a nightmare; these things, and then that ghastly fear-touch like the traditional mummy they were wont to promenade among the guests on such a night as this!

"Drink to rapture!"

Why not drink to the feverish dream that was fast drawing near to its end?

Scarcely had he turned his crystal goblet right side up again than a slave—she herself giving evidence of having looked upon the forbidden juice of the grape—had filled it to overflowing from the painted urn she carried.

"Drink to rapture!"

Menni took up the phrase as he slipped his arm about the beloved head of his girl-bride.

"Let us drink to rapture—"

"Yes—to ours—"

She sipped at the goblet he held to her lips.

"In lives to come," he completed the sentence.

She was still looking up into his eyes, the dawn of comprehension in her own—trustful, unafraid, a perfect picture of innocence and faith, when there broke out a blare of trumpets which was swallowed up almost instantly in a mighty, frenzied, disordered cheer from slaves and guests.

Into the setting that had been pre-

pared for her the living jewel had appeared.

Queen Netokris was on her throne.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BLACK LOTUS-FLOWER.

SHE had had a wonderful day, Queen Netokris—a wonderful and terrible day, for she had passed the preceding night trying every spell and incantation she had ever learned—the figure made by a beheaded snake, the position of black beans shaken in a bowl of rice, the flight of freed pigeons at dawn, and others less innocent, too terrible to mention. And all of them had given her the same answer. The answer was: Death!

Her own?

Her own! The answers were unanimous in that respect as well.

Was it on account of her slaying of Kashta? Perhaps. Of the sacred serpent? Most certainly.

It was this latter fact that had given the queen an added qualm of terror. It had all about it the element of the unknown, of mystery, of something she couldn't imagine or foresee.

Netokris had had a strange upbringing, surely. Not she, nor any one, knew who her parents were or what her race. Perhaps the old Kashta had known, but now Kashta was beyond telling forever, unless, forsooth, his "double," or mortal ghost, should appear to speak to her—which wasn't likely, seeing the way she had treated him.

He might appear to haunt her, might aid and abet her own taking off. It was graven in the rocks somewhere that the scribe Queni had thus been haunted for years by the double of his wife Onkhari. And this had furnished a fresh element in the emotion of that tremulous day. But frightened? Not yet! Not, that is, beyond the bounds of enjoyment.

For Netokris knew many things that seldom come within the ken of women,

or, for that matter, of any one else. From earliest childhood she had lived in the half grotto, half tomb where Kashta had made his home and cultivated his reputation as the man most feared and revered in the ancient land of Meroe.

Kashta had taught her all he knew of magic—all save the final mystery of making the sacred serpent talk.

He had proven his powers when he had ensnared the young Pharaoh Metemsa while on a hunting excursion into coming and looking upon Netokris while she bathed; had given further proof of his powers to the astonished world when he had caused Metemsa to marry this protégée of his and make her his consort on the double throne.

And Kashta, in his gentler moods—which were rare enough—had always told her that she, as well as her lord Osiris, was to die the violent death—"the sweetest death of all," as he was wont to say, "to one who loves such a thing."

Kashta owed her thanks for that—she had sent him out the way he wanted to go.

But what perplexed Netokris was this—that there was only one form of death provided for the man or woman who had committed the nameless sacrilege of killing the sacred serpent. Such, so the law proclaimed, should be taken by a priest of the cult and be suffocated in ashes.

Who was the priest, and where were the ashes? These questions had haunted her dreams, had haunted her while she was awake.

Then, late in the afternoon, she had found the thing she knew she had been expecting. It lay on the cedar chest at the side of the mirror in her dressing-room. A blossom which, from one end of the Nile to the other, was the symbol of approaching death—the black lotos-flower.

She was all alone when she found it. She had slept throughout most of the day, as was her custom, had bathed,

and taken a brief walk in the courtyard. The flower was not there when she left. It was there when she returned.

She picked it up, examined it, then threw it, with a slight shudder, behind the chest upon which it had lain.

The same answer was given to all her questions. No one had seen any stranger there, none of the ladies in waiting—none of the slaves, even, had been seen to enter that particular room since the Isis herself had left it.

Netokris did not say why she was so intent on this information; did not say that she had felt in her heart what their answers would be even before she had begun to question them. But if she had entertained any doubts about it before, those doubts had disappeared—the flower had been put there by magic.

The black lotos-flower, symbol of death!

To some extent—but in a different way—the day had likewise been a great and terrible one for the black chamberlain, Kovo, as well.

When he had first discovered the truth of what Memmi had indicated, when he learned beyond doubt that the sacred serpent, like Kashta, had been done to death, he was stupefied.

Like many men prevented from taking part in the activities of the world at large, he had developed within himself all the elements of fanaticism. Not for a second did he question the responsibility which his discovery had entailed upon him. He it was who would have to attend to the fulfilment of the law, to become the executioner.

He had not slept since the truth was revealed to him—unless you could call sleep that sort of lethargic trance into which he went at times, and during which he had the comfort and inspiration of beholding the spirit of Kashta.

Toward sunset on the day of the banquet in the subterranean treasure-house Kovo stole forth from the quar-

ters where his duties had always kept him and walked through that courtyard where there was a fig-tree at the side of the second fountain; and there he also saw something that he had come to expect—a lotus-bud of such dark blue as to be almost black. Once plucked it would become black.

It was strange that he hadn't noticed the flower before. His thin and clawlike hand was trembling as he reached out and broke the flower from its stem.

There was no need to wait. Everything was propitious. He would not be seen. He knew it, even as he started toward the apartments of the queen.

As a matter of fact, it isn't surprising that no one had noticed him—there were so many shadows assembling, like sentinels for the night, in the long corridors, the pillared rooms; he was so much like a shadow himself. As he came, so he went away again—silent, unobserved, having left the flower where the queen would find it as soon as she returned.

But the question which had troubled Netokris was also in the mind of Kovo—where and how should the law be fulfilled? Only, him the question did not trouble. He was a fanatic. He knew that the way would be provided for him.

In response to some wordless dictate born of his own brooding, he made his way toward the temple of Ptah, under which was the banquet hall. He was there, in the shadow of the god, when Menni made his appearance. He saw the expression on the young governor's face, and read it aright—the governor himself was approaching the dark frontier, and knew it.

Kovo took the incident as a sign. Then he remembered something that brought to his black and wizened face a grin of fanatic ecstasy.

There was an ash-pit in every pagan temple like this—a pit into which were cast the ashes of burned incense, ashes of the ever-burning "sacred fire."

He found it in a stone chamber

which opened off of the circular gallery from which the steps descended to the banquet-room.

It was there he waited for the things which he knew his own gods had in store.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE WATER-TRAP.

LANGUIDLY, while her favorite slave massaged her lithe body with fragrant oils from Arabia-Felix, restained the tips of her toes and fingers with bright-red henna, darkened her eyes, and arranged her heavy, fragrant hair, Netokris brooded over the events of the day and all that had led up to them.

To live, to die—she couldn't tell which she preferred, anyway. It was all a matter of emotion. If, as so many wise men maintained, it was only the body which died, there were still adventures ahead, whatever happened.

She looked at herself in her mirror. What she saw sent back to her a twinge of self-detestation. It was her own presence she had addressed in vehement but silent speech.

"Beautiful only in the eyes of fools! Growing old! All the fards and paints of the world no longer sufficient to insure your triumph! A good thing that the mummy-makers will soon be hiding you from mortal sight!"

She checked her soliloquy with a start. How about the dead serpent? How about the death by ashes?

The slaves were frightened by the suddenness of her bitter laugh, bent with greater devotion to their task. The Isis was dangerous when she laughed like that.

They dressed her in a wonderful gauze, a combination of shimmering silver and lustrous gold. They laced gold and silver sandals, with pointed, high-curving tips, to her small feet, placed the Double Diadem—"of the Vulture and the Snake"—on her head,

It was light, comfortable, well-fitting, like a turban, incasing her shapely head almost entirely. Over her bare torso they wound a gossamer scarf of the palest blue upon which had been embroidered with gold thread all the insignia of the upper and lower kingdoms.

An astonishing, disquieting presence when the slaves had finished their work. No mere woman could have looked like that—none but a goddess, surely.

A sort of melancholy satisfaction filled Netokris, in spite of her recent bitterness. For a time she stood by the window-door of the apartment gazing out into the courtyard.

The night had fallen—blue-velvet darkness, an unwonted excitement in the air—sprung, perhaps, from the throng of faithful subjects who swarmed about the temple of Ptah, in the hope of having a glance at her; sprung more likely still from the conflicting emotions in the heart of Netokris herself.

Her litter, and she was borne toward the temple, escorted, as always on formal occasions, by a brilliant company.

First of all, a squad of torch-bearers—black giants with loin cloth and head-dress of white. There are many such, for the queen goddess travels in a blaze of light. Then the heralds, in their uniforms of lemon and black, blowing on their buffalo-horns.

Chamberlains and other high officials of the royal residence—these dressed, for the most part, in stripes of scarlet and olive green. A hundred girls, many of them from the best families in Egypt, in white and gold—not overmuch of either, be it said.

And in the midst of them the royal litter.

It looked as though both sun and moon had united in the making of it—gold and silver—long-stemmed gold and silver fans waving about it, torches flaring, and in the center of it all—by far the most radiant and beautiful

feature of the spectacle—Netokris, the Isis of earth.

They had carried her into the interior of the temple when Netokris suddenly signified her desire to be left alone.

What were the feelings uppermost in her mind? Who will ever know? But there must have been some final hesitation on her part, some blossoming of softer instincts, perhaps, as she made her way, resplendent but heavy-hearted—as is so often the case when women are in festival attire—along the corridor lined with the statues of the gods, and entered the dark and cryptlike chamber above the banquet-hall.

Through the opening in the floor she could see all that was going on below—a riot of luxury, indulgence, of forgetfulness.

Contempt curled her lip, but she still looked, still sought that which she had come especially to see.

What was Menni doing? All in a single heart-beat she loved and loathed him, cursed and prayed for him, yearned to hold him close to her heart or to strangle him.

Then she saw—looked and looked while there blossomed in her breast another black lotus-flower—symbol of death.

Seated at Menni's feet was a girl with yellow hair—a girl whom, even at that distance and in that treacherous light, Netokris recognized.

It was Berenice. Berenice—a slave, a prisoner, a victim for the annual sacrifice—had found the means to place herself where she, Netokris, with all her power and all her cunning, had been unable to attain.

There was no question now as to what was taking place in the queenly breast. A goddess with a leaden, poison-swollen heart!

She tarried there until she saw Menni lift his face and smile in her direction, then stoop over and kiss the girl at his side.

With legs that would hardly support her weight, the queen, instead of re-

turning the way she had come, crossed the room and passed through a hidden door on the other side.

Not even Menni, the governor of the palace, knew the secret of this. He may have suspected, but he did not know. It was a secret sealed to the Pharaohs and their hereditary engineers by the lives of no one knew how many murdered slaves.

She had come into a stone passage just large enough to admit of her standing upright. It was narrow and dank. In the darkness she groped for a wooden lever, hesitated a moment, then exerted her strength to pull it far down—as far as it would go—experiencing a savage thrill as she overcame its resistance.

Then she listened.

From some place, very remote it seemed, she heard a splurging rush of water.

Still she waited, holding her breath as some invisible receptacle filled to overflowing, then clicked heavily to release the counterbalances of the granite doors of the hall below.

She reached still higher and found another lever which she pulled down as she had the first. There was a greater rushing splurge as an invisible column of water shot into one more invisible receptacle in the man-made caverns over which she stood.

"The water-trap!" she breathed.

She stood there for a second or two longer in a quiver of dread delight.

"The god Osiris," she whispered again. "will move—will move to-night."

The gaunt and sable Kovo—a mere black shadow among all the other black shadows there—saw Netokris come and go. He had started forward, hesitated, held back.

Some prescience—conveyed, perhaps, by the ghost of Kashta, who had become his guide—warning him that the moment was almost here: almost, but not yet.

Through the one door that remained open to the banquet-hall Netokris made

her heavy-hearted, tragic way to the throne which had been prepared for her.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BERENICE—OR THE THRONE.

EVERY one was standing. There were those who stood none too steadily—who leaned on the tables or were propped up by slaves who knew when and when not to laugh.

None of the slaves were laughing now. Most of them had developed the supersensitive instincts of hunted animals, and laughter had become for them merely a means of prolonging life.

And even then, while the cheering was going on, while the buffalo-horns of the heralds were roaring out their din, and every harpist, flute-player, and chorister in the place was trying to shape the confusion into the primitive strains of the "Hymn to Isis," even then there was something in the air which kept the supersensitive slaves from laughing, secretly or otherwise.

Was it possible that some subtle message of what was impending had radiated out from Netokris herself?

For almost a minute after her appearance she had stood there like an exquisite but strangely sinister statue of ivory, silver and gold, a slight smile on her painted lips, her green eyes as inscrutable as those of a basilisk.

Menni had also risen to his feet, but he had taken no part in the cheering. He stood rigidly erect, his heart beating strong, his left arm flexed about Berenice's slender but steady shoulders.

It calmed and fortified him to feel that there was no fear in Berenice any more than there was in himself, now that the crisis was at hand. It clarified his vision as nothing else could have done.

They had found—he and this girl he loved, his bride—the chemistry of courage. Let mountains fall upon

them, let the flood of the Nile sweep over them; still they were safe, united, joyful, unafraid.

Netokris had not so much as looked in his direction. Whether she had seen him at all or not he could not tell. Her eyes were those of one who sees all things or nothing.

Then she sank down upon the lion-covered throne, the eyes of her guests, and of almost every one else present, still upon her. Still they remained standing while a chamberlain, in his robes of scarlet and olive-green, knelt before her with a crystal cup. This she touched to her lips—a symbol that those who were there had dined with the Isis.

Such a tradition—one that could be handed on in even a princely family for generation after generation; one that would be engraved deep in the rocks of the tombs—"He dined with the Pharaoh!"

Then the guests were seated again, some of them—those who had not drunk as much as the others—wondering what was going to happen or had already happened. A supersensitive instinct was no longer necessary to proclaim a change.

The "Hymn to Isis" had by this time gained ascendancy over all other sounds, and was throbbing through the heavy atmosphere of the place, flutes and harps, voices of men and women.

But the change that had taken place could not be ascribed to this. It was greater than sound. It was as though the fumes of revelry had suddenly been blown away like smoke.

Even Prince Tentares—his fat face pink where it wasn't purple—found himself suddenly, heavily sober.

Where were the group of young dancers who had surrounded him, only a minute before, when the Isis appeared?

Gone!

He glanced round him heavily, striving to regain control of his blurred faculties.

He saw the furtive and melancholy

Prince Saïtes glide from his place, make his way toward the green bower which surrounded the room, attempt to pass by one of the openings through which the slaves hitherto had come and gone. Then there occurred something which Prince Tentares was never to be sure was reality or the signment of his wine-drenched brain.

He saw Saïtes at the arbor; saw him halted by a black slave; saw Saïtes fall as though he had been stabbed.

Tentares dragged his eyes away and looked round him. It was true that the chair in which Saïtes had sat was empty.

For a ghastly moment everything about him disappeared—lights, colors, the draped dais on which Netokris sat. He swayed slightly. Instead of the things which he had just been seeing he saw the moonlit peristyle of a temple; saw Metemsa, the Pharaoh, approaching alone while he and Saïtes and the other conspirators shrunk together behind the columns.

Had they been found out? Had the truth been revealed? Was this the vengeance of the gods?

Those nearest Tentares saw his face turn ruddier still; saw him totter for a step or two, then fall.

Ordinarily it would have been a great event—this swooning of such a rich and famous prince as Tentares was, there in the presence of his queen. It would have been a greater event, even, than the stabbing of Saïtes, had they seen it, for Saïtes was a man of many enemies, and his principality was small. But, for the dullest witted, the chilling change that had come over the face of things was now apparent—a change so grisly and heart-chilling that not even the fall of Tentares was of any importance compared to it.

Two things—the music had stopped; a naked runner, his brown skin glistening with sweat, was crouching at the feet of Netokris.

In the swift silence that engulfed the place there was heard the muffled, gurgling splash of hidden waters.

A petrifying spectacle!

Most of those there—princes, slaves, musicians, all those who had not run away while there yet was time—no less immobile than the eight colossal statues which looked down upon them: that naked slave crouching at the feet of Netokris, a most incongruous personage in a banquet-hall—as incongruous as the close silence, the far rumble of water.

Menni and Berenice were conscious of the change, perhaps, before the others there. It was but a vaster harmony to the tragic theme of their own destinies.

Then, just as the runner appeared on the dais of the throne, Menni heard himself addressed. He turned, saw standing there a man whom he recognized as one of the Macedonians under the command of Kalthos.

The Macedonian was too far gone for speech, was gasping for air through tight lips. But there was no need for speech. He was holding out a bit of crumpled papyrus.

Menni took it, recognized the work of Kalthos—crude, hasty, but legible and graphic.

Come. Now the Double Palace falls before our assault. Lo, now may Prince Menni himself be the Osiris!

A reeling second, then Menni turned to the man who had brought the message.

"It is well. Flee! Tell him who sent you—"

The man had panted back some of his breath.

"Kalthos bade me see you safe. The palace was taken when I left him. A revolution—you—you—he could not write it, but he commanded me to say all the troops are yours!"

"Then hurry. We follow."

Even as Menni said it his voice failed him. There had gripped him the choking sentiment that what he said were empty words; that what he said couldn't be—a vision of closed doors, of Baknik and his councillors far above him some place in the starlit

night. There followed a swift revolution. All this in the fragment of a second.

At his word the Macedonian had leaped forward toward the nearest opening in the encircling bower. A Nubian stopped him. The Macedonian had run the black through, turned with the word "Now" forming on his lips just as the mace of another sable giant from the south crushed him to earth.

Menni paused.

For a second he didn't dare even look at Berenice. Still hope, had he been alone! Still time for a man to fight his way to freedom, to the outer air, to the double throne!

But encumbered as he was!

His eyes flashed to the throne. Netokris was looking at him—alert, cruel, a savage smile on her lips.

He shook his fist at her—laughed as he did it—then, as a new and hideous clamor broke out in a far corner of the hall, swept Berenice into his arms.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

OSIRIS MOVES!

A NEW and hideous clamor beginning with a drunken cry of fright, a shriek, a dozen of them, a chattering crescendo, as the momentary lull that had fallen upon the place a dozen seconds before exploded into disordered sound.

So peculiar is the action of the human mind in a crisis like this that Menni believed, for the instant, that this was the response of the mob to his defiance of the queen. But before he could turn he knew the truth—believed in upon him.

"Osiris! Osiris—moves!"

There was a sort of ripping thunder, as though all the heralds had gone mad, were screeching their madness through their buffalo horns. But over it all, and over the shrieks which were inarticulate—

"The god moves!"

Then that other sound, answer to the question that had sprung into his brain the very instant that he had heard the words he knew now he had been expecting all along. He was even surprised that he had not heard it before—that surging splash of water.

All this while he was turning. Then he saw it.

One of the colossal statues was still trembling on its outward swing, shaken by the rush of pent-up waters.

The current was doubled while he looked—a mere, fleeting glance though it was. How brown that water was!

The Nile, when troubled!

The Nile, and this the prediction—this the hour that had been foretold! There was a feeling almost of elation in his heart.

He was only half-conscious of what he said. It was more of a glad, wild cry, anyway, than anything articulate.

"Oh, see! Oh, see!"

Berenice had also exclaimed, was looking up at him, her face flushed, her eyes shining. At that there disappeared his last remaining shred of regret. He knew now how she felt about it. They were one in that.

There was a jamming herd from the far parts of the room—guests and slaves, men and women.

At first, here and there, hysterical laughter; a monarch from the Delta, still hung about with bedraggled lotus, standing on his table and bellowing to others to do likewise; a supreme jest of the Isis—thus would she find the brave; the howling mockery of those who couldn't understand, even now.

But everything was changing with incredible rapidity; changed as a castle in the sand changes with the sudden wash of a wave.

A mere breath of time, and then the howling stampede—blows, curses, whimpers, prayers, the overpowering, all-absorbing rush of water.

The moment that he had seen the nature of the catastrophe Menni had leaped, bright-eyed, smiling, trailing

Berenice by the hand, stooped, and seized the Macedonian's short-handled spear. It was better to be armed.

He had a flashing vision of a Nubian's face peering at him from the bower.

He poised the spear. The face disappeared.

They were in an eddy of the crowd. Moblike it had surged toward the far corner where others had disappeared apparently to safety. Menni guessed the truth. That portion of the Nubian guard which had been placed on that side of the hall had yielded either to force of numbers or to fear.

"Come!"

Menni had to shriek the word to be heard at all.

The water was a plunging brown cataract now; was slopping over the floor half-way to his knees, its lapping surface half covered with a litter of scarfs and flowers, of branches and pelts.

They plunged toward the throne. One try, anyway. He laughed and drew Berenice after him.

If he could only kill Netokris! He shouted his intention to Berenice, though he knew she couldn't hear him.

Was she trapped, too?

Again their eyes met—his and the green eyes of the Isis.

It must have been but the barest fraction of a second, measureless, like all of this, in ordinary terms of time—a succession of infinitesimal flashes—no more.

His spear-hand was up.

On it there flashed the blue sapphire. Of that he was conscious. Of all the things he saw, of all the things he heard, and all the things that he was conscious of (though he neither saw nor heard them in the whirling surge of impressions), that sapphire still on his hand was one of the mighty facts—as mighty almost as the great fact that this was the fulfilment of the prophecy, and that he and Berenice were about to die—die together here in the boiling waters of Father Nile!

Then, even while he looked—in that infinite flash, while surely they had made but a splashing lunge or two—he saw a gaunt, black shadow spring from the draped skins of zebras and giraffes just back of the throne. He saw the black shadow seize upon the queen—a jungle spider that clutches a glittering bird!

This—then shadow and queen were gone.

Menni looked back at Berenice—the first touch of horror amid all the horror that struggled so near to them. She also had seen it. Her eyes told him so.

They reached the throne, and plunged across it to the door that was hidden beyond.

That also shut.

Menni had caught Berenice's face to his breast, fearful lest she should see—not the closed door, but the shambles there.

The door was closed, and against it a mass of fighting black giants. They had been sent to hold others to the death; had received no warning themselves of what might be in store; had looked with indifference on the panic, on the rush of water.

All in good time and they would escape!

Too late!

What was there left to do but slaughter, to surfeit the blood-lust as long as there was blood to shed?

Berenice's face against his breast, he staggered back—back as far as possible from the struggling, shrieking wretches.

Why shriek and howl and weep and pray? The granite has no ears to hear. And even if there was escape! What for? What to? A little more time to breathe, to eat, to suffer, or to laugh!

He had thrown the useless spear away; had lifted Berenice as though she were a child. A swirling torrent almost carried him from his feet. He swayed against it; smiled at the girl. Joy once more flashed into her eyes.

"We die together!"

She spoke it with her lips to his.

"No, live—"

"Together!"

The clamor and the lights died out together.

The waters were whirling and churning deeper and deeper until they were swallowing the very cataract that fed them.

Then darkness and silence—silence save for the suck and slap of dispassionate waves.

"We—defied—Rhodopis—"

"Through—love—through—"

Peace ineffable! His eyes fluttered open.

— — —

CHAPTER XXXV.

FORWARD, FIVE THOUSAND YEARS.

His brow was wet.

He recognized the characteristic smell of Nile water.

But he had ceased to struggle.

A delicious lassitude had overspread his body. He saw them but dimly—the blue eyes of Berenice—but they were looking down at him full of love and tenderness, even with a certain joy which he felt instinctively had not been there before. With recognition, such peaceful joy came into his empty heart he almost wept. If this was death, it was very sweet.

"We defied Rhodopis," he murmured.

The words did not come as easily as they should. This perhaps was a condition of his new state with which he was as yet unfamiliar.

A strange yet familiar voice came to him out of space to the left of him.

"He speaks of your Aunt Rhodopis—"

"Not of Aunt Rhodopis," he protested; "but of Netokris, the infamous—"

He had turned his head slightly and was looking at the speaker.

"Hello, Nefru!" he said.

"Oh, Alice," said the elderly lady.

"he is still delirious! He calls me his nephew."

Alice! Berenice!

The late governor of the palace of the Pharaohs sat up. He was feeling a trifle giddy. He knew there was a misapprehension somewhere. But his senses were becoming instantly clearer.

He resented the charge that he was still delirious, even if he ever had been.

"Where am I?" he asked.

Gentle hands were trying to force him back to his pillow as the beloved voice of Berenice—or Alice—was telling him that he was safe in his bed at Shephard's.

He allowed himself to be coerced, and closed his eyes for a moment or two while his head sank deeper into the pillow.

"This is Egypt?"

"Yes, dear."

"And Memphis?"

"No, dear; this is Cairo."

That gave him food for meditation. Cairo—Cairo! The name was absurdly familiar.

"Aren't the pyramids there, across the sacred lake?"

Before any one could answer the question there was a soft tap at the door, then a hearty voice:

"Easy, there! Easy, there!"

"Kalthos!" the ex-governor murmured.

Followed another minute of dazed groping, then he felt a goblet on his lips. He drank. Whatever the brew, it was astonishingly aromatic and refreshing. By the time that he had accomplished his third swallow of it his mental sun was up altogether and chasing the mists away.

Again he opened his eyes, and this time recognized his old friend Blake, the hotel physician.

"Hello, doc!" he said blandly.

"Hello, Carlton!" said the doctor cheerfully.

"Just now," Carlton remarked gravely, "I thought I was Menni."

"One of you is enough if you're going to act like this," replied Dr.

Blake jovially. "Here, take another drink of this."

There was a flutter at his side which caused Carlton to turn abruptly to the girl with the fair hair and violet eyes. He reached out and took her hand.

He knew perfectly well now that she was Alice; but as yet it hardly seemed fair to call her anything but Berenice. He compromised.

"Sweetheart," he whispered, "you and I were married once upon a time long ago in ancient Egypt."

It was a pretty little scene—Carlton a trifle pale and hollow-eyed, Alice blushing prettily.

Her aunt knew that she should have become indignant. Why, they were hardly promised to each other! No contract had been signed. The family solicitor had not even been consulted as yet. But the aunt could not become indignant, try as she would.

Instead, there was merely a moistening of her eyes, a slight reddening of her honest, unpowdered nose.

Carlton still smiled tenderly as he looked at her past Alice, again thought of old Nefru that morning they had left her—he and Berenice, he and Alice—there by the red Pyramid of Menkaura. Was it not just possible, after all, that they were the same?

"Now, not too much conversation," said Dr. Blake as he prepared to leave.

"Kalthos giving a command," Carlton reflected. "I wonder how he came out with his assault on the palace?"

He was still clinging to Alice's hand. Again his eyes had found hers.

"It's all right, doc," he said aloud; "I'm going to let them do most of the talking. And now"—he began as a blind to deceive the physician until they were alone and he could proceed at leisure to find out the things that he most wished to know—"and now, my little darling, tell me where you have been."

Alice's face was suffused with a fresh blush. It was delightful, but George had never spoken to her like this in the presence of auntie.

Auntie expressed her own emotions with a slight ejaculation, rather of consternation than of anger.

"Well, there's American impetuosity for you!"

"We went up the Nile," Alice hastily took up the tale to cover any embarrassment which might be abroad. "We went the full distance, visited everything, the tombs at Abydos—oh, yes, I must tell you!"

She hesitated, a bashful light in her eyes, an almost schoolgirlish giggle on her pink lips.

"I almost—*almost*!—brought you a present. Just before auntie and I went back to the steamer at Abydos a miserable heathen, clad in nothing but grins and mud, came along with the dearest little rabbit in his arms. I bought him—the rabbit, not the heathen—and was going to bring him to you. The dearest little rabbit! I thought of you when I kissed him—"

She stopped, amazed at her own hardihood, and there in front of her aunt!

"Thanks—the rabbit looked like me, I suppose," Carlton laughed.

Then, as recollection from the past again welled up from the secret places of his brain:

"Hold!" he cried; "let me tell you the rest of it. You kissed the bunny on the head and wrongfully thought of me; the rabbit jumped from your arms, raced down the plank, and got away. The children chased him into some reeds, but failed to catch him."

Both Alice and her aunt were looking at him in frank amazement.

"You were there!"

"Some one told you!"

"Yes, some one told me," Carlton said with a shade of desperation—"some one named Baknik!"

Yet, surprising as all this was to Alice and her aunt, there was a still greater surprise in store.

It was surprising, as a matter of fact, that no one fainted—and this refers to Carlton quite as much as it does to the women.

Carlton had shifted his position a little to his right side, a movement which brought his left hand for the first time into view.

There was a flash of blue—of the very bluest blue in the world.

"The sapphire!"

"The ring my Aunt Rhodopis lost!"

The latter exclamation from Alice was frankly emotional. What followed was almost a sob.

"Oh, George! Where did you get it?"

Carlton himself was looking at the gem which adorned his finger. Where did he get it? It was another question that was pounding through his brain just then.

Suppose that he told. Would they ever—ever believe him?

Silently he looked from the sapphire on his hand to Alice, to Alice's aunt; then back again.

"You found it!" Alice exclaimed tremulously as she tried to smile.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

LADY RHODOPIS TREVELYN.

It is just as well perhaps that both Alice and her aunt were willing to put down much that followed in the next few minutes to Carlton's illness—as the evaporating fignents of his recent delirium.

He said such queer things—was so oddly incoherent! Time after time he had confused the Egypt of to-day and the Egypt of thousands of years ago.

At last they went away and left him "to rest" in the vehemently protested watchfulness of the faithful Osman.

But in the minds of both of them, and in Carlton's mind, was the fact—tangible, hard, brilliant—that on his hand was a sapphire of price—if, indeed, it was not priceless!—that was not his own; which was, according to all the evidence thus far presented, the property of one Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn!

For a minute or two after the ladies

had gone Carlton watched. Osman slipped noiselessly about the room—immaculate in his white, night-gownish *galabeah*, his red *tarboosh* set at a rakish angle on his close-cropped head.

"Osman, get me a Scotch and soda while I get up."

Osman looked at the patient with a superior smile while he slowly wagged a finger of denial.

"To-day, medicine; to-morrow, Scotch!"

"Osman," remarked Carlton with disconcerting indifference, "you remind me of a slave I once owned by the name of Naktmout. Do you know what happened to him?"

It was evident from Osman's expression that he didn't know, but was eager to learn.

"He disappeared," said Carlton steadily; "disappeared just like that."

Said Osman: "Scotch to-day, medicine to-morrow!"

Apart from the one great fact of the sapphire, and the lesser, but possibly no less surprising incident of the rabbit which Alice had bought at Abydos, the affair might have appeared simple enough.

He had gone out to the pyramid of Menkaura "on the night of a new moon," and then something had happened to him. A recurrence of the effects of that old sunstroke of his, most likely. He had been discovered in the morning by Arabs and a small party of tourists, identified, and sent back to his hotel.

All within twenty-four hours!

The ice tinkled in his glass, and he stared down at the jewel on his hand.

Fair Rhodopé, as story tells,
The bright, unearthly nymph who dwells

'Mid sunless gold and jewels hid—

It must be known, this sapphire, since both Alice and her aunt had cried out so spontaneously at sight of it.

And there had been something else; something hidden and disquieting in their reference to "Aunt Rhodopis,"

just as there had been in the reference that Alice had made to that lady the other time, when Alice referred to her early girlhood. Alice's words returned to him: "She struck me!"

Rhodopis had struck Alice. Might it not be that Netokris, rather, had struck Berenice?

Carlton had a shivering flash of thought about the mad Arabs he had questioned—the old man on the steps of the mosque of Ibn-Tulun, the beggar at the door of the Coptic church. Was he to join that crazy band? He laughed mirthlessly. He, also, had seen the Woman of the Pyramid!

He was feeling a trifle dizzy—in spite of or because of his Scotch—but, with the aid of the protesting Osman, he managed to dress himself. He would look up Alice, get what consolation he could from her society, anyway, and put the whole plagued riddle off until his head was solid enough to tackle it in a scientific way.

He was in the lower hall—a vast and ornate place suggesting, with its pillars and exotic plants, its swooning music and intermittent gusts of perfume, the Double Palace of the Pharaohs—and he walked toward the shadowy alcove where letters and telegrams were distributed.

The place was presided over by a well-groomed young Englishman with whom Carlton was on excellent terms.

But, for the moment, Carlton wasn't seeing him at all.

Instead, his eyes were riveted on a small, hand-written placard suspended to one of the pillars. This placard read:

LOST—Antique ring with sapphire known as the "Tear of Ra."

He was still gazing at this curiously insufficient but startling announcement when, just at the side of him, there was the soft *frou-frou* of a passing woman; a woman who was exceedingly well dressed, who threw out from her—at least it impressed Carlton that way—a nebula of perfume and personal magnetism.

He felt all this even before he looked at her. Perfume and magnetism—call it that for want of a better term—gave him an inexplicable thrill of horror.

It was deeper and more subtle than a mere physical thrill. It was something that sprung from the deepest cells at the back of his brain and thence spread outward.

The lady had paused and was speaking to the young Englishman in a well-modulated voice:

"Is there anything for me?"

"Nothing, Lady Rhodopis—"

The woman passed on. Her carriage was erect, graceful, and quick. Was it possible that she stopped at the other end of the hall, turned, and looked back?

Carlton didn't notice. He was hoping that, if he did go insane, they wouldn't have to put him in a strait-jacket; that they would "remove" him to California.

"Dear! Dear! Mr. Carlton," exclaimed the young Englishman, "you should be in bed, sir!"

Said Carlton: "Eyes staring, pupils large—"

"No; but joking apart, sir, you do look a bit queer, you know, and it's rather serious to be knocked out—"

"By whisky or hashish."

"No danger. Dr. Blake himself put it down to that old touch of the sun; as did also, of course, every one else, including her ladyship."

"Her ladyship?"

"Bless me!" he cried, "are you still in the dark as to what happened to you?"

"I most certainly am. Go ahead. Her ladyship—Lady Rhodopis—"

"Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn—it was she who found you. She is always doing things like that. A trifle—ump! how shall I put it?—a trifle—oh, you know—rich, eccentric, and—the kind of woman that other women whisper when they talk about."

"*Demi-monde?*"

"Ump! *Trois-quarts.*"

"Go on!"

"Well, she was indulging one of those freaks necessary to ladies of her peculiar temperament, it seems; had gone out to see the pyramids by starlight; found it so 'alluring, so exquisitely fascinating,' as she put it, that nothing would do but she make a night of it, have her breakfast sent out from the hotel—a regular caravan, and all that sort of thing.

"And, along after the sun is well up, my lady and her escorts find you in some impossible crevice of the Third Pyramid. Great excitement, greater excitement still—meaning not the slightest grain of disrespect, you understand—when Lady Rhodopis discovers that she has lost that famous sapphire of hers."

"Really famous?"

"Oh, dear, yes!" Pantlin answered. "'Tear of Ra,' old Egyptian gem, all sorts of queer superstitions about it, carries hypnotic power; any one who steals it, or even keeps it, or something like that, becomes the willing slave of the rightful owner. Oh, all sorts of blithering nonsense! But she herself is a mystery."

"How so?"

"A regular mystery until she married the late Sir Rupert. He met her out here some place, you know. Romantic story; while on a shooting-trip saw her taking an open-air bath, or something like that. Not long afterward, if you recollect, he was—"

"Murdered—stabbed full of holes."

Spontaneously, almost unconsciously, Carlton had completed the phrase.

Before he could recover from his own surprise there was once again that suggestive *frou-frou*, and he was aware of the same cloud of perfume and magnetism, the same whiff of horror, which he had remarked before.

He closed his eyes for a second. His imagination presented a scene all pillars and exotic plants; but whether this was a mental picture of the modern hotel in which he stood or the Double Palace of the Pharaohs, in which he once had stood, he could not say.

Nor could he, for a faltering moment or two, have stated with certainty who or what was this other presence there beside himself.

He opened his eyes.

The same woman who had been there a little while ago had returned—slender, beautiful, somehow snakelike.

"Oh, Mr. Pantlin," Carlton heard her say in a voice that stirred him strangely, "I forgot—"

Then she turned and looked into Carlton's wondering eyes.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ALICE GETS A SHOCK.

OF one thing he was absolutely certain; she was that particular "familiar spirit" of his—the alluring "ghost" he had seen in London, in Munich—that night in the Ludwigstrasse with the music of "Aida" in the air—again in the Bois de Boulogne when the Tziganes were shivering the atmosphere into prismatic chords.

Greenish eyes, long-fringed, hypnotic, somewhat cruel; thin, black brows, almost perfectly straight except where they drooped at the temples; lips of a coral perfection one could scarcely expect from nature unassisted.

Instinctively Carlton looked at her finger-tips. They were exquisitely manicured and delicately pink.

His eyes were back to her face again. Quite apart from any volition on his part, there had come to his eyes a glow of suspicion and challenge.

"Oh, Lady Rhodopis, permit me, pray—" the eager Pantlin interceded. "This is Mr. Carlton, of California. Mr. Carlton, Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn."

As his fingers closed over hers, Carlton felt them tremble slightly. If Lady Rhodopis was experiencing anything like the emotional hurricane through which he himself was passing, it wasn't surprising that her fingers trembled.

"I understand," said Carlton softly—softly enough to conceal most of the tremor in it—"I understand that I am deeply indebted to you, that it was you who saved my life."

She bit her pink lip, turned to the young Englishman.

"Do take down that absurd sign, Mr. Pantlin. I am sure that I'll get my ring back without—without—"

Carlton opened his mouth to speak, to confess that the sapphire—the Tear of Ra!—had already been found, was even then reposing safely in his pocket; but for the moment he was as voiceless as a sparrow in front of a blue racer.

"I was on the point of having some tea. In fact, the table is waiting now," Lady Rhodopis was saying. "I am all alone. You will come along with me, won't you, Mr. Carlton?"

For another fraction of a second Carlton was silent. Where was that confounded voice of his?

"Why—why certainly," he stammered.

Good Heavens! Was he a thief? Was he hypnotized?

Was he stark mad, like the old man on the steps of the mosque of Ibn-Tulun? Would tourists be hunting him up some day to hear him tell about the time that he was young, the admired of Mark Twain, and how he had gone out to keep a rendezvous with the Woman of the Pyramid?

All the time that he was walking along that pillared, lofty hallway he was obsessed by a sense of unreality, by the haunting uncertainty as to whether this really was the hotel or the Double Palace, whether this was Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn at his side or Netokris, she who united the two kingdoms, Isis on earth.

Half a dozen times he had opened his mouth to speak about the gem which had come inexplicably into his possession. But each time, as though inspired by some satanic instinct, his companion had forestalled him with some random remark.

It was as though her personality wasn't limited at all by the exquisite dress that clad her slender shape—a dress of lace and gold, he vaguely noted—but this personality of hers encompassed him all about in her special atmosphere of delicate perfume and powerful magnetism.

By the time that the suave and silent *suffragi* had placed them at the reserved table Carlton had ceased to struggle. Moreover, as he looked at her across the linen and silver he thought that never before in his life had he seen a woman more potentially perilous to masculine peace of mind.

He could see that every man within the range of vision was conscious of her presence. It was but another detail to strengthen the hold upon him his hallucination already had. That was the way certain princes he had known had once upon a time looked at a queen of ancient Egypt.

Perhaps this last feature suggested itself as Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn cast at him a sudden look from her Nile-green eyes—a look which might or might not have been full of veiled significance.

Lofty ceiling, painted pillars, rare plants, the pulsing music of a hidden orchestra, in which, for the moment, the harps and flutes seemed to have the best of it; high, wide-open windows, through which were visible segments of a sky so near and blue as to seem almost tangible: these things and the presence of her whom he felt he had known across the centuries, who roused within him a frost-needle of fear, and yet, likewise, the glamour of fascination.

Suddenly she spoke:

"Are you angry?"

The question caught him by surprise, yet, at the same time, precipitated his doubts.

"You're trying to play me for a fool," he said softly, yet with brutal directness. "Tell me—you've haunted me? You've sent your spirit across my path?"

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Her voice was even softer than his. She had leaned forward. All at once her breath was coming quick.

"What you say is true. An old, old trick—as old as Egypt, as old as the world—this making your astral image appear before some one whom—whom—"

"Whom—"

It was more of a command than a question. It brought a stain of darker color to the woman's cheeks.

"Whom you love," she whispered falteringly.

"Good God!"

"Quiet! Closer! I've loved you—loved you ever since I saw you on that first trip of yours to Egypt. But I wasn't free. And then, as soon as I was free, I began to seek. Oh, listen! You, who are a scientist, explain this to me—the mystery of love at first sight, yet one-sided. See—"

With a quick movement she had half opened the fan she was carrying, had indicated in the fold a thin-bladed dagger.

He looked at it with horror as its blade shimmered there in shadow—a flashing thread of sinister, phosphorescent light.

"Not yet," she repeated with a little laugh. "I have found out the futility of it, and there is still a chance. I studied magic under an old man in Abyssinia—"

"Of ancient Meroe."

"And he gave me a certain gem."

"The sapphire—it was you who put it on my finger."

He reached for it, but she stopped him with a movement and a flash of her eyes not devoid of terror.

"Keep it yet a while."

"Why?"

"My old faith in it is strong. It has magical powers, magnetic—electricity in solid form, a thing to work miracles with. Moses knew when he put jewels in the ephod."

"And your miracle—what is it you expect?"

She shuddered slightly.

"That day you give it back," she breathed, "I shall know whether to use this dagger of mine or not. They call me Rhodopis, but I am Netokris still."

Alice Wentworth was both alarmed and pleased when she had got back word from Carlton's room that he had gone out. He was always so bold and indifferent of consequences! Still she was just a little piqued that he hadn't, first of all, let her know.

There was sufficient reason why they should see each other and have a talk—the matter of that sapphire. It was the talk of the hotel that her aunt had lost it. It was equally the talk of the hotel that Aunt Rhodopis had been Carlton's rescuer.

Expectant, troubled, increasingly eager to find the principal player in the little drama of her thought, she had turned into the tea-room. A careless glance, and then she was standing petrified.

There was Carlton and there was Aunt Rhodopis. Her they had not noticed at all as they gazed into each other's eyes.

She started to turn away, a premonitory pang of terror in her heart, turned back for one more look.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

FAREWELL, EGYPT!

LONELINESS, disillusionment, the utter vacuity of life on this planet, or any other, so far as he could imagine it!

That sums up to a certain extent the result of the long and careful analysis of things in general made by the gifted young scientist, George Carlton, Esq., as he gazed out of his window over the smiling land of Egypt.

He confessed to himself that for the past couple of weeks he had not been in a particularly brilliant condition to note facts and draw deductions from them. But he was pretty certain, none

the less, that his conclusions were generally correct.

During this period he had seen scarcely any one save Osman and his friend, Dr. Blake. But he had kept himself informed, in a dazed, detached sort of way, of all the news which concerned him most.

An intermittent fever, purely physical, had kept him in bed ever since the fall. Another sort of fever—likewise intermittent, but in no sense physical—had kept his thoughts from ordinary activities, as well.

Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn gone!

She had surprised every one by packing up her thirty-three trunks and getting away far before the usual date of her annual departure. Women glad of it, men sorry.

It would have been difficult to say which he was, glad or sorry, so far as Carlton was concerned. In his moments of dejection he wished that he had never seen her, cursed her and everything that appertained to her. But, as his health came back, such moods became increasingly less frequent.

He would fling the thing out, find out all that it had to yield.

He could have sent that sapphire of hers—either by registered mail or by some trusted messenger from among his acquaintances—to her house in Park Lane. But he could not bring himself to do it. The thing had cost him too much already to surrender it now without finding out, one way or another, just what there was to it.

For Alice and her Aunt Mary had also gone away.

The thing bit into his soul. He knew now, if he had never known it before, that Alice Wentworth was the preordained. He and she had lived and suffered together in ages gone. He felt the tidal wave in his heart of all the devotion to her which had begun—like the attraction between sea and moon—at the very beginning of things, which always had been and always would be.

"I heard another crazy man," said Osman as he arranged some flowers on the center table, "who claims to have also seen the woman of the pyramid."

"Bah!"

He shuffled about his room in pajamas and slippers, got rid of Osman, brought out the little farewell note that Alice had written him, essayed again to extract consolation from it.

DEAR GEORGE:

I am so sorry that you are ill; that we must leave—Aunt Mary and I—while you are still down. We have been such good, good friends.

But Dr. Blake assures us that there is not the slightest danger; that you are getting on famously. Please do not think that I was angry when you told me over the telephone that you still had the sapphire. Of course you know best.

With very best wishes from both auntie and myself, believe me always,

Your sincere friend,

ALICE WENTWORTH.

Blessed little contentment could he extract from that!

He owed this to Alice, as well as to himself. He ran his fingers through his hair, stood puffing at a cigarette for a while as he stared down at the writing-pad on the desk in front of him. Then he sat down and began to write.

It was a letter to Alice, but much of it he was afterward to use in that not very widely circulated but justly famous monograph of his. For this reason it will, perhaps, be permissible to quote an extract or two. He wrote:

Psychology still remains in a chaotic state. Of all the ancient sciences, it remains the one science in which no apparent progress has been made in the last ten thousand years.

It is only by research such as this that we may hope to make progress—the careful, scientific scrutiny of mental phenomena.

Such an experience I have had, an experience all but unique in scientific history. I should, indeed, add a weight to my conscience did I fail to study it further in all its aspects—magic,

witchcraft, glamour, hypnotism, unconscious cerebration.

Poor Alice! We wonder how much contentment she could extract from that? But the longer that Carlton wrote the less he was thinking about Alice, the more he was thinking about the absorbing theme his own "case" suggested.

One more extract, as an example, and that will be all:

To many investigators, in recent years, it has become increasingly apparent that in so far as using the mind as an instrument is concerned, the west has still everything to learn from the east.

To examine the stars, we of the west have invented telescopes. They of the east have so developed their mental powers that they can send their spirits to rove at will in sidereal space. How, otherwise, can we account for the accurate astronomical knowledge of the ancient Egyptians, the Chaldeans, the Chinese? They had no telescopes.

To examine the infinitely small, we of the west have invented the microscope. They of the east, by an effort of the will, can reduce consciousness so infinitesimally small that they study the anatomy of a microbe as we, with our clumsy tools, might study the anatomy of an earthworm or an elephant.

Now, after all that I have seen, I am convinced that the ancient Egyptians did more; that they applied their mental powers not only to perception—to seeing the infinitely small and the infinitely great—but to dynamics as well.

In other words, that many of the stupendous tasks they accomplished—to-day impossible—were accomplished by *thought-power* alone.

There were other strange bits—many of them, for the letter was a long one. Take, for example, the reason he gave for hanging on to that troublesome sapphire.

It is impossible to make a direct quotation—either from the letter, because here he became tender and reminiscent, repeating much that we already know and much that no one but he and Alice has any right to know;

nor from that subsequent monograph of his, because here his language is altogether too technical—language that no ordinary man could understand, even with a dictionary at his elbow.

It all had to do with something he called "metempsychosis," a weird mental power he had first encountered among certain highly developed holy men of India.

Given a fragment of bone, for example, such a man could clearly see and describe the entire animal from which the bone had been derived—whether his neighbor's cat or a prehistoric mastodon.

Given a bead or an amulet or a shred of linen from an ancient tomb, the wise man could fix his "third eye" upon it and see the original owner as clearly as though he were still on earth and standing there in front of him; not only the original owner, but the civilization in which he lived, his personal habits, his private vices, and things like that.

Now, according to his own explanation, that was why Carlton persisted in clinging to the sapphire Aunt Rhodopis had unquestionably thrust upon him—in clinging to it even at the risk of losing the very best girl on earth.

It wasn't the spell that mattered so much. He wasn't interested in Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn's love-affairs; nor in his own, if the truth be told.

He was thinking of metempsychosis, no less. It was thus he explained that deep, deep look he had taken into the daily life of old Egypt. By the grace of Ammon-Ra, he hoped, through the same means, to do it again.

Then who would have further reason to mourn the lost wisdom of the past!

Carlton read this remarkable missive over again after he had finished it. The oddest love-letter ever written, surely! There was a wry smile on his face.

"I've seen the Woman of the Pyramid," he soliloquized. "I have, all right. I'm loony; I'm crazy."

Then, having done what he had to do, he was suddenly submerged with homesickness, a mad desire to get away.

Alice gone. Rhodopis gone. No one left in Egypt but himself and the ghosts in his brain.

Egypt, farewell!

Before this, you have sent out tragedy and mystery and love, O thou sacred land of Kem! Which of the trilogy are you sending out with this youth who sails away from your delta now? Of all the men and women who crowd those white decks, he alone has a memory of the days of your youth. He carries away with him the only teardrop shed by the father of all your gods, 'way back in the dawn of creation; the tear he shed when sin first appeared on earth.

What do you send along with it—tragedy or mystery or love; or all of them, as you've so often done before?

The above is an inadequate transcript of George Carlton's mood as the steamer he was on drifted her quiet way past felucca and yacht, past dirty schooners with red sails, past trim, great square-rigged ships, past a long white transport with the Stars and Stripes aloft.

Egypt, farewell!

Had something really happened to him? Wasn't he just a trifle unhinged? He had never felt so terribly choky and sentimental in his life.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CARLTON DECIDES.

SPRING was already far advanced when Carlton got back to London again; for on his arrival at Marseilles he had found cablegrams from his lawyers that had taken him as far as California before he felt free again to go where he would.

But all this time—all the time that he was hearing talk about "original grants," "equities," "section three-forty-six," and things like that -- he

was wondering what this had to do with Egypt, with Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn, and, most of all, with a certain English girl named Alice.

There was evidence, even, that the stout and perfectly groomed lawyer—otherwise omniscient—had never so much as heard of the Woman of the Pyramid at all. And as for that thing called metempsychosis!

Carlton still clung to the sapphire. He had tried all sorts of experiments with it—had sat for an hour at a time with it gripped in his hands, trying to "concentrate" on it as he had seen Indian yogis do; had slept with it under his pillow—but all without result.

No, there had been one result.

His relations with Alice Wentworth were decidedly strained; that is, if you can judge by the written word—which you can't do, as a rule.

Two little letters, and that was all. The first, in answer to his own, begged him to return the gem—a delicate hint that to receive and keep "such a valuable present" was, under the circumstances, one of the things that "nobody does."

The second letter, in answer to his reply to the first, briefer even; not very much credence so far as scientific explanations were concerned; a suggestion of long-suffering patience, or hopelessness, or sorrow.

Carlton was inclined to be indignant. Not even a professional psychologist can always penetrate the psychology of the girl he loves; told himself that he had been at pains to make a perfectly clear and frank explanation; the trouble was that Alice wouldn't listen—wouldn't listen, that is, to anything save the dictates of her own heart. Girls, even the most fascinating, were exceedingly trying at times, he had to admit.

Still, his sense of self-justification could not quite overcome a lurking sense of remorse as he walked out of Charing Cross Station and turned up the Strand.

It was one of those evenings when

the London climate is at its best—indefinitely mild and suave, just smoky enough to soften outlines and harmonize colors. Old-ale atmosphere—at once soothing and mildly stimulating!

Carlton felt an expansion of inner joy. This was where his heart was—he was "home" again.

At his hotel he dressed, ate a tremulous dinner, then summoned a taxi and went out to look for Alice.

He had received no answer to letters or telegrams he had sent since leaving California, but he had no doubt but what he could find her.

Disappointment!

Neither at her own house in Berkeley Square, nor at her Aunt Mary's house in Brook Street, nor yet at another aunt's, where Alice occasionally made her headquarters, in North Row, could he find her.

His one best bet, he told himself, was back at the house in Berkeley Square. There the servants knew him. He knew that they were not lying to him. They had greeted him with the masked but none the less genuine cordiality of their kind.

Miss Alice was out. They weren't sure when she would return, sir. Would he wait? Yes, for a little while.

It seemed now that he had not seen her for centuries. He called himself names. All the time minutes were slipping away—minutes from their precious lives—minutes that they could never, in long eternity, reclaim.

Why had they ever separated at all?

In his pocket his hand came in contact with the small box in which he carried the sapphire. That was the reason. The fact brought a flush of wrath to his cheek, of self-denunciation to his heart. He had hung onto the thing in spite of the danger of it. Now it stood fair to wreck his life.

Science! What was science compared to Alice's happiness and his own? This love of theirs had grown through the centuries, and now, in the name of science, he was ready to chop it down!

Again his hand touched the box. It filled him with a species of horror; the same sort of horror that he had felt when Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn first confronted him, face to face; the same sort of horror he had felt back in ancient Egypt when she had sought to entice him in the pyramid—again in the “City of the White Wall.” And he had been such a fool as not to have recognized it!

“I really do not believe, sir—begging your pardon, sir,” old Bates began (he knew intuitively how his mistress felt concerning this handsome youth), “that Miss Wentworth will be long.”

“Thank you, Bates,” Carlton answered; “just a little drive about and I’ll be looking back.”

But would he?

Something within him told him that the hour had come for him to return the sapphire. It would be now or never.

Do what she would with that polished little blade of steel in her fan—the one she had shown him that day in Shephard’s—the sapphire he would give back to her.

Hadn’t it begun already to weave its subtle spell of bad luck about him; to keep him away from Alice; to draw him by cords which he could neither see nor otherwise break into the entanglement that had cost him his own life and the life of the girl he loved, once before, thousands of years ago, in the stifling waters of the Nile?

CHAPTER XL

FORBIDDEN TERRITORY.

SHOULD she or should she not?

That was the question that had kept revolving in Alice Wentworth’s exceedingly attractive head.

Should she take the advice of Aunt Mary—to say nothing of the other aunts—and stay away from Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn altogether, or should she obey the push of every ounce of curiosity and impulse in her

heart—as well as incidentally keeping a promise she had once made—and pay the mysterious big house in Park Lane a visit?

To a certain extent, the question had become one of those—like, what is life?—which we keep putting off until we are dead; and even then—who knows?

At first she had roundly sworn that she never would. That was when she had just left Egypt, while she was still under the domination of all the thoroughly unpleasant emotions that her stay in the ancient land had aroused.

Heartache, loneliness, disillusionment!

It was hard to be a woman, so Alice told herself.

But time, to some extent, had soothed, even if it had not healed. Likewise, it brought the galling suspicion that possibly she had been mistaken.

Aunt Rhodopis had given George a jewel of price; but Aunt Rhodopis had a well-established reputation for being eccentric, if nothing else.

She had seen George gazing, entranced, into Lady Rhodopis’s green eyes; but the poor boy was really ill at the time—was suffering from the after effects of sunstroke.

The whole situation was too deep for her. She gradually acknowledged the fact; acknowledged it more than ever after she had read those strange letters of Carlton over and over again. But that she should be out of it—anything but that!

Out of the confusion of her thoughts and sentiments had come this certainty: she was waiting.

Waiting for what? She herself could not have told. Aunt Rhodopis was in it—Carlton was in it—this supreme situation which she vaguely felt to be impending. But what it was—this ultimate solution—that she could not or would not say, not even to herself.

She had lost interest in all those things that had interested her before. Not in Constantinople nor Rome nor

Paris—in all of which places she had found happiness before—could she find happiness now. It was the same way with London, the same way with the country places of her friends and relatives to which she was repeatedly invited.

Then, one day, she had turned up those long-spurned letters of Carlton's and had wept over them.

There was no denying the fact: she was homesick for Carlton. After all, what did she understand of the things that he had told her about. She had no head for science, for the psychology of either East or West.

Such things were all right for him.

But all that mattered for her was the outstanding mountain-peak of her love for him—something as old, she told herself, as any mountain-peak, anyway.

And Rhodopis! She had turned him over to the tender mercies of Rhodopis!

She wrote two letters that night—long ones; the first to Carlton himself, the second to the interdicted aunt. Both of them breathed the same spirit, put into them unconsciously—her loneliness, her willingness to forgive, her desire to be in touch with both of them, to fathom, even a little bit, the fathomless future in which they three were cast for important rôles.

It is a pity that the servant to whom these letters were given never posted them—still a pity even if neither of them could have possibly averted the impending tragedy.

One afternoon, Alice, who had just returned from almost a month of constant visiting in the country, went unaccompanied for her drive through Hyde Park.

Old Sedly, who was long in the service of the Wentworths before Alice was born, was about to turn out by Hyde Park corner, when Alice asked him to continue on up the Ring toward the Marble Arch.

Sedly was a bit surprised. It was high time he was getting home to tea.

But he gave no sign. Nor did he give any sign a little later on when a still greater surprise befell him.

He had come into Park Lane; was driving slowly down toward Mount Street; was just passing the large house to which, not within the past twenty years, had he driven a member of 'is family, sir, when he received an order to stop.

It was a great house set back somewhat from the street, protected by a high iron fence, of which the gate was closed. But the curtains were up; the place had a general air of being occupied.

Hardly able to believe that it was he who was doing it, Sedly looked at the door of the mansion and raised his whip slightly. Almost instantly the door was opened and a liveried footman had hastened out to where Alice waited.

"Has Lady Rhodopis returned?"

The footman had recognized Sedly, even if he hadn't recognized the lady in the carriage. The card she had placed on his silver tray he had not of course dared to so much as look at—not yet.

"Thank you, ma'am," he answered.

"Her ladyship is expected hourly."

"Tell her, please," said Alice, with a feeling almost of panic engendered by her own boldness, "that I shall drop in for a few minutes this evening—unless—unless—"

She took her card again, and penciled a telephone number on it.

The emotion in Sedly's heart was no greater than that in her own. Miss Alice going to see Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn with such spontaneous haste! He wondered if he should not in some way convey the information to higher quarters. He still considered Alice as more or less of a child.

But Alice was not in doubt as to whether she should tell her aunt or not. She was determined that she wouldn't. This was her own affair.

Instead of taking tea with Aunt Mary, as she had promised, she drove

at once to her own home in Berkeley Square, ate dinner there—and not very much of it—in solitary state, wondering what she was going to say, what she was going to wear, what the result of it all would be.

She was frightfully nervous. Of that she was sure. It was as though all those premonitions of hers, all those vague but undeniable intuitions which had been obsessing her ever since she had left Egypt, were taking form, were “materializing,” like the ghosts at a spiritualistic séance.

In his comfortable home in the “mews” Sedly was stuffing himself with beefsteak pie. His wife, wholly unlike Sedly himself, was slim and sallow, and, like most thin and sallow people, was inclined to look upon the darker side of things. But this time even Sedly agreed with her.

“You’re right, old woman,” he kept repeating. “You’re right. I’ud blime me, I sez all along as ‘ow ‘twere goin’ to make trouble like.”

“Worsener’n trouble,” opined Mrs. Sedly cadaverously. “H’t’s wot was intentioned w’en the death-spot kept turnin’ up all afternoon in those fortune-tellin’ cards!”

CHAPTER XLI.

INTO THE SHADOW.

THERE was no doubt at all but what Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn was the victim of forebodings even more than her niece had been—which was only natural perhaps, in view of the fact that her ladyship was not blessed with the clearest conscience in the world.

She had always spent much of her time alone. She was one of those women who are almost always alone, no matter how many people are round. Never before had this innate, unbreakable solitude so weighed upon her.

She was a good deal of a mystery even to herself. She had never been like other children, like other girls, like other women.

A strange career!

A hazy recollection of Europe, of Asia, and of Africa that covered the period of her earliest childhood; a long period in various schools for young ladies, broken by a memorable visit to Abyssinia when she was but sixteen and her presentation to the Negus, who told her that he was her guardian; a year at the half-savage, half-Oriental Aderach, where she had received the best of care, had learned many curious things; then her marriage with the wealthy and once-celebrated Sir Rufus.

No wonder she was superstitious—that is, if by superstition one means the belief in signs and symbols which have no meaning for the generality of people.

But Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn, still not much more than a girl-bride, had known all about it before her husband was brought back to the hotel from a house in Old Cairo that night with his body riddled with dagger-wounds. She had had nothing to do with it—merely knew beforehand that it was going to happen—that was all.

How did she know it? There were still effective ways of looking into the future—for those who know how—both in India and Africa; and the new Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn had acquired most of them. To her such things came as naturally as sewing does to other girls.

Then, amid the unceasing whirl of travel and siege, which had followed since then, she had developed her psychic powers on her own account.

That first visit of hers to England had not been a very great success. She was a widow even then, and the great house in Park Lane, which had been a part of her legacy from the murdered Sir Rufus, had more or less frightened her from the first.

Still more was she frightened the first time that she ever saw her niece, Alice Wentworth.

Frightened at the sight of a pink-and-white, yellow-haired child! Who could explain it?

Lady Rhodopis could—and did!

A handful of black beans in a bowl of rice, and she knew that some day she and this little daughter of the West would stand together in the house of death, and that it was she, Rhodopis, whom death would choose.

Again and again she tested the prediction—by different means highly considered by those who had taught her, but which would be properly barred from the polite literature of the Occident—and the answer was invariably the same.

Fear, panic, distrust, and distress in her unaccustomed surroundings, she had struck at the child one day with a dagger. It wasn't her fault if the little Alice had moved at just the right second, had received nothing worse than a blow from her aunt's wrist.

That was years ago; but neither Rhodopis nor Alice had ever forgotten, naturally.

Then Rhodopis, in one of those peculiar periods of clairvoyance which she could induce at times—but not always—by a certain formula she had acquired before her marriage, came upon the American youth named Carlton, who obviously intended to make Alice Wentworth his wife.

Rhodopis had taken to following Alice about in her dreams as much as possible, certain as she was that their threads of destiny were intertwined.

From the first time she had looked upon him—there in the Savoy dining-room—Rhodopis knew that the third actor in the drama of her life had appeared.

Folks often wonder at the moods of beautiful young women. They wondered enough at the moods of Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn—cruel, passionate, yielding, cold, gay, morose.

She was as much of a mystery to herself as she was to any one else, if the truth be told; and this is apt to be the case with any one who mixes magic and love, as the secret histories of the world fully demonstrate.

And Rhodopis was in love. She

made no secret of it even to herself; had acquired that cunning little dagger she always carried with her for no other purpose.

"If we can't live together, then we can die together—he and I, he and I! And after death who can tell? Perhaps the books are wrong. Few wise men—whether they were of different schools of magic or the same—have ever agreed as to just what happens—after death."

Immediately after her scene with Carlton in the tea-room of Shephard's that day she had gone up to her rooms well-nigh intoxicated with new hope. The old curse was lifted. She could have danced or prayed—did both to some extent, as she worshiped some god or other in a pagan rite she had picked up Lord knows where.

But she was true to form; dropped out of sight for a while. It was never a good thing to press one's luck too hard. A month later found her among her friends at Addis-Ababa.

What happened there? Who can tell? There are powerful magicians still in Ethiopia—the ancient Meroë—who can look into the future as certainly as most people can look into the next room.

Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn left the only real home she had ever known, taking with her a trailing black shadow—a shadow which at times encompassed her about. Moreover, the shadow had a voice. This voice said:

"Until the jewel comes back. I give you until then—until the jewel comes back!"

At which Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn was wont to smile. She was nothing if not courageous. She was a creature of magnificent nerve—something of a tigress, take it all in all.

The shadow dogged her into India, whither she had gone in quest of certain powerful medicine she knew about. She needed it. For some time now she had been unable to project her "double" into the paths she would have had it follow.

She had been shut off from Carlton as effectively as though she were the merest shop-girl. But the moment was approaching—this she knew—when she should see him again; when it would be he or the shadow.

He or the shadow! Both perhaps. She had her dagger; and, as she watched the fateful play of the black beans in the bowl of dry rice, she would smile in that somewhat sad, passionate way of hers.

She had cabled word to London to have her house in Park Lane put in order.

She had never loved the place greatly, but she had gone far to make it less terrible than it had been—had filled it with the things and the symbols that she loved; had, as some had said, made something of a museum of it, so full was it of curios, so Egyptian in its decoration!

Would it not be as good as any other place as a stepping-stone up and out when such a stepping-stone was needed?

CHAPTER XLII.

THREE—AND A FOURTH.

Just about the same amount of disease and poverty, of vice and crime, in the greatest city of the world—ancient or modern—yet night was settling down over London as sweetly and poetically as though it were Strawberry Hill.

This was especially so in the neighborhood of Hyde Park—a soft breeze, flavored with the smell of geraniums and clipped lawn; stars, coming out dimly through the high overhang of smoky mist; decorous houses with the blinds pulled down, as though everybody was going to bed, which everybody was not of course; but a general impression of quiet eventide.

A strange hour and a strange quarter of the world for any one to be haunted by ghosts and other haunts come out of India and Egypt; and yet

this was the case with Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn.

To some extent it was the case likewise with Mr. George Carlton as he turned into Park Lane from the north. It was even more so the case with Alice Wentworth as she turned into Park Lane from the south.

Fate has a habit of pulling on the strings she keeps tied to all of us, bringing two or three—and sometimes another—together when we are the least expecting it.

Only, in this particular instance, one of the puppets on the string was fully expecting it.

As Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn sat before her mirror in the dressing-room of the big house from which she had so long been absent, her first impression was that she was more than ordinarily beautiful.

Yvette, her maid, was *extasiée*, and said so, frankly and volubly, as she fluttered about her mistress like a butterfly about a flower.

A robe of silver gauze with just enough gold in the composition to make it one of exceeding richness. Lady Rhodopis always was daring and original in her dress—never more so than now.

For not only was the dress itself subtly suggestive of old Egypt, but so was her *coiffure*, which was arranged to imitate the double diadem of the Pharaohs—vulture and snake.

A queenlike presence! Cleopatra herself would have been glad to look like that—a gold and silver masterpiece that was even more of the pagan goddess than she was the pagan queen.

Yet, after that first slight glint of satisfaction, Lady Rhodopis felt an instant and profound reaction. It was as though the reflected shadows back of her had taken form, had materialized into the gaunt and shriveled form of a grotesquely tall, thin negro.

She shuddered slightly.

"*Madame a froid?*"

"*Mais non, Yvette!*"

She was thinking of the old, old

horoscope which she herself had cast in this very house, in this very room, years ago, and in which it was written that she and Alice Wentworth should stand together some day in the presence of death, and that death should choose between them.

She sought to cast off her nervousness—lit a cigarette, called for a finger of brandy.

No use!

Once more those shadows reflected in the mirror from the twilight depths just back of her had taken form—the form of a gaunt negro, miraculously tall and thin. But her nerves seemed sturdier now.

She studied the apparition. Where in her past had she seen such a one before?

Suddenly she let out a little inarticulate gasp which was neither of regret nor dismay—just surprise, surprise while her fingers mechanically touched the first fold of the fan she carried, made sure that a certain slender bit of steel was there.

She had recognized this thing.

Once, centuries ago, tens of centuries ago, in the Temple of Ptah, another such apparition as this had seized upon her—as certain great spiders of the jungle seize upon brilliant birds—ad then—

"Yvette"—softly—"who is it standing there back of us?"

"But no one, *madame*. Yes—oh, it is Fullaire bringing a card for *madame*!"

Yvette herself had stepped lightly forward and taken the card which Fuller had brought to the door.

"Miss Alice Wentworth!"

"Show her into the blue drawing-room. Tell her I shall be there instantly."

Fuller had gone away with the message.

Lady Rhodopis smiled once more into the mirror. Fuller had gone. It had not been he who cast that shadow there.

Again it loomed up out of the gloom

behind her—crooked, black, tall, a burnt pine of a man. Still smiling at the reflected image of the thing—real enough, even if it was unreal—Lady Rhodopis made a slight sign with her finger, such a movement as a Sicilian peasant might make in warding off the evil-eye. But the ominous thing did not disappear.

"You are not feeling quite right," Yvette suggested. "Will *madame* not take a little more of the *fine*?"

"*Mais non, Yvette. Je suis bien.*"

She didn't lie. She was well, in an exalted sort of way. But she knew now that that materialized shadow was real. It was this that she had brought with her out of the ancient land of Ethiopia, of the Meroe she had known in ages past.

In a little while, now, she and Alice Wentworth would be standing, even as she herself had predicted it, in the presence of the sable shadow. One or the other of them would be the elect.

She wasn't frightened. As she cast her last look at herself in the long mirror, she was wondering where George Carlton was. She only wished that he might be there, that he might look upon her while she was dressed like this.

A final touch with one pink-tipped finger, automatically, unconsciously—an old habit of hers—to make sure that the slender blade of steel was hidden in her fan, then she was ready to descend.

Steadily, gracefully, a smile of welcome on her lips, she passed through her bedroom to the corridor which led to the top of the grand staircase. There she paused.

Another visitor had arrived. She heard a man's voice—a voice she recognized—asking whether she was at home.

Then: "Give her ladyship this, please, when you present my card."

She needed no other explanation.

Carlton had brought the sapphire—the Tear of God Ra—the emblem of grief cast down to earth by the father

of all gods when sin first appeared on earth.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"A SHADOW OF THE STAIRS."

SCARCELY had the second footman turned away with the card and the little pasteboard-box which, like Pandora's, was so full of fatefulness, than Carlton heard a glad cry, a beloved voice pronouncing his name.

He turned with an echoing cry springing up from his own heart. Had he thrown off the curse so soon?

Unable to hold back that first impulsive movement of love and joy, fearful almost, even now, that the light of her life might escape again, Alice Wentworth had come to the door of the blue drawing-room, uttered that cry he had heard, then regretted the action just enough to make her blush and wilt with sudden timidity as Carlton saw her.

"Alice!"

"George!"

About the entrance-hall of Trevelyn House the genius of the present owner had reared a series of Egyptian gods—lofty, placid, chaste and passionless—all of them staring out into eternity with the same expression as that worn by the sphinx, by the great Harmachis, father of terrors.

But even their graven ears must have tingled a little at the magical vibrations set astir as the two young people standing there pronounced each other's names.

It was more than just mere love—great as that love was. There was something of tremendous relief in it, as well—as though each had stood in the presence of death, had seen, each in the other, an earnest of salvation.

Alice had stepped forward to greet him after that first moment of exquisite hesitation. He had gone forward to meet her, had seized her hands in his own.

They murmured the same words

they might have used, thousands of years ago, back there in the subterranean treasure-palace under the Temple of Ptah in the City of the White Wall—then when they stood in the presence of tragedy and, none the less, smiled into each other's eyes.

Did the memory of that remote hour return to them now? Who can tell?

The place where they stood was ablaze with light. But, somehow, it was as though they were suddenly enveloped in a special atmosphere of mystery. It was as though they two were all alone—spectators who wait—amid a sort of dead calm.

Not knowing or questioning why he did it, Carlton put his arms round Alice and drew her close.

She didn't protest—surrendered herself. Their hearts were beating wildly; but they both said afterward that there was more of elation in it than fear—the solemn joy of a judgment hour.

Then they turned.

The fraction of a second only, but they had stood there expectant—sure only of this, that they were together, and so would always remain. Then it came—a small sound, yet fearfully great in that tense, surcharged silence and suspense.

A human cry, otherwise indescribable!

It was as though all the pain and all the joy in the world had sought utterance at the same instant through the voice of a single creature, of a single woman.

At the head of the grand staircase they saw Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn appear—a vision of beauty, yet sinister, unearthly, cruel. An apparition from a dream, rather than a London hostess descending to welcome her guests; a vision out of Old Egypt, of the Isis on earth!

She had smiled at them; had stood there holding in her hand the little box that Carlton had sent to her.

A flash of steel; then a gaunt black shadow, which enveloped her as she

fell, stifled that fearful cry they had heard.

They both saw it—that shadow. It had appeared so suddenly out of the black-and-gold silk hangings, and a moment later it was gone again. Yet both had recognized it—even Alice—for in that flash of terror she recollected something that heretofore had lain buried—oh, at a fathomless depth—in the deepest, uttermost cells of her brain.

This, then the vision of a reeling, frightened man servant, and Alice had buried her face in Carlton's shoulder.

Followed, for her at least, a swift period when it was as though the waters of the Nile—or the Thames—were rushing in to submerge her; and through it all the consciousness that there was some one at her side to whom she clung; some one who whispered that Rhodopis was dead—or was it Netokris?—but that they were safe and would live forever, come what would.

CHAPTER XLIV.

CONCLUSION.

"Do you want something new in the way of novels, my dear friend?" This is a quotation from Jules Clarctie. "Extraordinary novels, filled with incredible adventures which, at the same time, are absolutely true? Then read the books wherein scientists tell you what occurs in the human brain!"

Alice Wentworth Carlton, a year or so after the events recorded in this history, came across that extract from some preface or other written by the French Immortal, and agreed with him perfectly.

She had come to understand many things, to take a larger outlook on life in general, had come to look with complacency even on the fact that her husband divided his devotion between her own sweet self and his science.

That's not always the way with the

bride of a month or so—or of a decade or so. Though, of course, it should be.

The suicide of the beautiful Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn had been a tremendous sensation for a week or so. But it was so thoroughly in keeping with everything else that was known of her mysterious, tempestuous character that no one greatly wondered.

The house in Park Lane, and all that was in it, is the property of Alice now; but she and her husband will never live in it. They have turned it over to become an embassy, or something like that. Anyway, a rich American has taken it and is giving occasional fabulous entertainments there.

If it is true—as it is whispered—that the wraith of the lovely and tragic Lady Rhodopis sometimes appears before the guests at these entertainments, now in the guise of a queen of Old Egypt, now in the shimmering silver dress she wore on the night of the tragedy, that is but another element in rendering these entertainments so notable.

She has never appeared like that before Alice or George. For which they are grateful.

For that matter, no one, since the death of Lady Rhodopis, has ever seen again the fabled Woman of the Pyramid. There were many who tried to do so—more than ever because, somehow, the tradition got abroad that she was that—

Bright, unearthly nymph who dwells
Mid sunless gold and jewels hid,
The Lady of the Pyramid.

It was to Egypt that Carlton and his bride returned for their wedding tour—a pilgrimage, as much as anything else. Secretly, they both trembled a little at the prospect of what might happen to them there, but they found that the ancient land was robbed of its terror, was robbed even of much of its mystery.

Perhaps this was because they understood so many things not under-

stood by most of the tourists who visit the Nile.

It was even something like a visit to the old homestead that afternoon they went over to the site of ancient Memphis.

Nothing now to mark the great metropolis they had known, scarcely a remnant of the "City of the White Wall" save a fallen statue, a palm-grove, a squalid village where peasants lived out their mud-covered, sun-baked lives—these and the eternal pyramids.

"All changed," whispered Alice—"all changed save them and us."

"Lord—the faith and the knowl-

edge that went into them!" Carlton exclaimed. "No wonder they are everlasting!"

"But see, we also are everlasting."

"Ah, that's because we represent something else which never dies. We represent—"

He cast a quick and furtive glance around them. Every one else, even the Arabs, had found momentary absorption in the colossal statue of the great Ptah, fallen centuries ago. No one was looking.

"We represent this."

Carlton hastily bent his head and kissed Alice on the lips.

(The End.)